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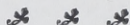
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TO THE READER.



These addresses were given extempore at the Sunday afternoon service for men only, held every Sunday during the last four years at St. Columb's Church, Hawthorn, and are really little more than "Notes" published at the request of several members of St. Columb's Brotherhood (which has enrolled nearly four hundred members since its inception), and with the hope that they may prove helpful to other workers amongst men.

Many, as will be seen from their titles, have reference to local or national topics, e.g., the Visit of the American Fleet, Lessons from the Melbourne Cup, the Newcastle Coal Strike, the Annual Church Parade of the United Friendly Societies of Hawthorn, but I thought it better to leave these as delivered.

I believe strongly that the future success of Christian work lies with the men—if the man is a Christian, the home is generally a Christian one or soon will be—therefore the chief object of Church work should be to interest and attract them. Fifteen years' work amongst all sorts and conditions of men has convinced me that they are quick to appreciate any effort the Churches make on their behalf, and will gladly listen to any appeal made to them by those who realise that they are brothers exposed to the same temptations in life as they themselves

are, and not little tin gods set on pedestals, and paid so much a year to "talk pious."

A clergyman is reported to have gone to the great actor David Garrick and asked him, "How is it that I, who speak facts, can only draw hundreds, while you, who speak fiction, draw thousands?" The actor replied, "I speak fiction as if it were fact, you speak fact as if it were fiction."

If we clergy put this advice more into practice, and let men see that the Christian Church has a message for them as well as for women and children—a Gospel for this world as well as for the next, to help them in the trials and difficulties of life—that God needs their assistance to make this world of ours better—we should hear less of such questions as, "Why don't men go to church?"

H. F. MERCER.

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Melbourne.

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A GOVERNMENT CRISIS.

"Know, O King, that the law of the Medes and Persians is that no decree or statute which the king establisheth may be changed."—Dan. vi. 15.

GOVERNMENT CRISES are generally brought about suddenly and unexpectedly, often by a "snap vote," and yet frequently they have far-reaching consequences upon the whole of a nation's history. Sometimes, on the other hand, they simmer out after giving splendid copy for the newspapers, and in a short while are almost forgotten. Government crises are not the product of the 19th or 20th century. They knew what they were in the days of Moses, when Korah, Dathan and Abiram opposed the Government of the day; again when the host of Israel assembled on Mt. Carmel for the memorable contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal; again in the days of King John and the Magna Charta. In all these instances, and countless others, great leaders by their brave actions have saved the nation, while others, by their cowardice and fear, have suffered their country to be defeated and themselves disgraced.

A GREAT CRISIS HAD ARISEN IN BABYLON.

Daniel had been promoted for his faithful service, and then, as now, great jealousy was aroused and very bitter feelings were indulged in. Talk about "imported parsons!" why it's nothing to the row there was amongst those one hundred and twenty princes of the Medes and Persians when this "importation," Daniel, was placed over them! Some men in his position would have "put on airs," not so Daniel;

he, like Lord Brougham, "feared man so little because he feared God so much," and bitter as his enemies were, they could find nothing against either his character or his work "except concerning his God." I fear it wouldn't be difficult to find things against us. Would it, men? Fearing to attack him openly, these sneaks waited, and at last a favourable opportunity presented itself. Daniel was away—perhaps for a week-end visit—and during his absence they induced the King to make a law ordering that nobody should pray or make any petition of any god or man except the king for thirty days; and King Darius, not 'cute enough to see through their tricks, signed the decree, and it became a law of the Medes and Persians that could not be altered.

Away these princes went, and I can fancy them dancing round the corner and patting each other on the back and saying, "Now we've got him," and one might have said, "I was afraid the old boy would have spotted what we were after, but he didn't"; and if they had any hotels in Babylon, off they'd go and shout drinks all round, and drink to Daniel's speedy death.

Daniel heard of the decree very soon—there are always plenty of people glad to carry bad news—and he knew it was hopeless to go and see the King. The law couldn't be altered, and if His Majesty had dared to attempt it he would have been deposed at once, and, perhaps, beheaded; so Daniel went and prayed to his God, not because he was frightened or in trouble, as we often do—and it's the only time some of us think of it—but because it was his custom. And right here I learn this lesson, that

GOD GIVES MEN COURAGE,

and enables them at great crises to be calm and brave. We may have been in a funk before, we have

dreaded the trial, but when it has actually come upon us we have found, haven't we, that God has given us courage and help to bear it? And

YET WE FEAR TO BE A CHRISTIAN!

I think it is because we've got wrong ideas of what a Christian is. It doesn't mean being goody-goody and going about with a face as long as a fiddle, sighing about all the sin in the world and quoting texts of Scripture all day long, but it does mean, men, always living to please God, having that as our aim constantly before us, and by reason of this, being brave and courageous to do the right.

Some will hate thee, some will love thee,
Some will flatter, some will slight;
Cease from man, and look above thee,
Trust in God and do the right.

Another "tip" I get from this old story, and it is this—

GOD HONOURS THOSE WHO HONOUR HIM.

Every fellow worth his salt wants to get on in life, and I'm sure Daniel was no exception to this rule. He didn't want to have a harder lot than necessary, but if ease and position and money meant denying his God, then Daniel was willing to let these things go. He was a man who put God first in everything.

How frequently men say to-day, "I'd like to be different. I ought to be a Christian, I know, but if I tried to serve God it would ruin my business." It didn't ruin Daniel, though I expect the estate agents called upon him to arrange for the sale of his goods, and the lawyers urged him to be quick and make his will. Amidst all the excitement and the fiendish glee of his enemies and the misery of the King, Daniel

alone remains calm and peaceful, his trust in his God. Into the lions' den they threw him, and put a great stone over the mouth of it, and sealed it with the king's seal, and with the seal of his lords, and back they went to dinner, congratulating themselves that they had done with Daniel for ever, and speculating who would get his billet. But "Man proposes, God disposes," and next morning they sang another tune. A messenger came to them at breakfast time to tell them that the king had been early to the den and had had the stone removed, and that Daniel was alive, and that God had sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, that they hadn't hurt him; forasmuch as an excellent spirit was found in him, and he had done no wrong against his God, his King and his country.

Then we come to our last lesson, which is that

GOD WINS AGAINST ALL OPPOSITION.

Men like to be on the winning side, and when his enemies found that Daniel had won, that his opponents had been eaten up by the lions, they went over to him like a flock of sheep.

Men, though the odds seem against it, God is going to win at the last in spite of all the opposition of the devil and men combined. Let us be on the winning side, then, and let this example of Daniel give us courage to stick up for God in spite of opposition, and we shall find, as thousands since Daniel's days have found, that "Those who honour Him, God will honour."

FRIENDS WORTH HAVING.

"A band of men whose hearts God had touched."
—I Samuel x. 26.

SOCRATES USED to say that "every man had need of a faithful friend and a bitter enemy"—the former to advise and help him; the latter to warn him and keep him constantly on guard. Saul had both; a faithful friend in Jonathan and plenty of bitter enemies—fellows who declared he was worthless, and who despised and made fun of him. Saul would have been a wiser man had he used these to keep him constantly on the watch, and had quietly gone on his way and done his work. Do the same, men—ignore, the enemy, however bitter they may be, and go ahead and do the work God has for you to do.

SAUL HAD A VERY HARD AND DIFFICULT TASK BEFORE
HIM

—he had to found a kingdom; and kingdoms aren't built in five minutes; neither can a man found a kingdom single-handed. Saul needed the help of others. And, men, it's a solemn thought that Christ has so ordered that He needs our help, and His kingdom cannot be founded or extended in this world without it. It was a great honour for these men to be helpers in founding a kingdom, and framing the constitution for Israel. And, men, if we only realised it, it's a great honour to be helpers in founding the kingdom of Christ in this world. Here in this sunny land a vast field of usefulness lies at hand—young lives can be trained up for God—the foundation stones laid upon righteousness, so that the

safety of future generations may be guaranteed; and all this can be done, and only done by ourselves. A great heritage is entrusted to us, and if we fail, posterity will be the poorer, and a glorious opportunity for God will be lost for ever.

These men, whose hearts God had touched, went to the King, ranged themselves on his side, formed his bodyguard, and stood up for him against all comers. Why? Because

THEY WERE PROUD OF HIM.

Handsome, well set up, towering head and shoulders above them all, with the figure and gait of an athlete, he was just the man to be a popular favourite—the darling of the people, and an ideal King. Everybody would want to see and shake hands with him, and these friends of his would be delighted and proud at the enthusiasm aroused, and awfully pleased that they themselves were “in the court set.” Would to God, men, we had more of this spirit in our religion—more of the spirit of men who are tremendously proud of Jesus Christ, and who are in love with Him, and will stand up for Him against all comers. Why, think

WHAT A HERO CHRIST WAS.

Artists, I fear, have rather given to the world a false idea of Christ—depicting Him—may I say it, reverently?—as rather weak and effeminate, instead of strong and manly, and the greatest hero the world has ever seen. The reception He met with when He began His public work—His rejection by the Jews and their refusal to recognise His claims—would have disgusted most of us, or else made us afraid,

and we should have given up. But no thought of this ever crossed Christ's mind; quietly, calmly, bravely, He went about the work the Father had given Him to do; and such a hero was he that, even in that last cruel hour, when He could have saved Himself from it all, He endured the Cross, despising the shame. Why? For *you* and for me

“He died that *we* might be forgiven;
 He died to make us good;
 That we might go at last to heaven,
 Saved by His precious blood.”

Oh, men, isn't He a hero? Isn't He One to be proud of, and to call forth all our love and devotion? Men have considered it an honour to serve, in however a humble position, under some of our great military leaders. Would that we had some of this spirit in our religion, and, instead of being ashamed of being a Christian, regarded it as the greatest honour to be under His banner. Inspired by His example and His heroism, let us go out to fight bravely for Him, and win the Victoria Cross of God's kingdom for valour in His service. The sad part of our story is that

SAUL WAS NOT WORTHY OF THEIR DEVOTION.

In spite of all his privileges, he fell into grievous sin, and those who before were so proud of him held their heads in shame. How true this is of life to-day—men are worshipping idols—things, or persons who are not worthy of it—and we find out, sometimes, to our bitter cost, that those we have loved are unworthy, and we are ashamed to be known as those who were once their friends. Nobody has ever

been ashamed of Christ, though Christ has often been ashamed of us. He, and only He, is worthy of our heart's devotion and love. Oh, men, as we think of all He bore for us, of all He wants us to be and do for Him in this world ; of the great " kingdom-making " to be done here ; let us enrol ourselves under His banner as the men of our text enrolled themselves under Saul's, and go out to fight for Him and be His true and faithful soldiers and servants unto our lives' end.

THE GREAT COAL STRIKE.

"Why should the work cease whilst I leave it?"—
Neh. vi. 3.

THIS IS the sad part of all strikes—the cessation of work and the consequent dislocation of trade. Whatever opinions we may have as to who are right and who are wrong in the Newcastle strike, we all must sympathise with the true working man—with the man who is not a loafer, but who honestly tries to get work, to procure a living wage, so that he may keep his wife and children and home respectable and enjoy the necessities and some of the comforts of life.

WHY SHOULD THE CAPITALIST

—be he a mineowner or manufacturer, or whatever he likes to call himself—live in luxury and ignore the existence of—nay, in some cases, treat as a slave—the man whose brain and muscle give him his broad acres and big banking account. Thank God this state of things is fast passing. Employers are realising that those who work for them have a claim upon them, that they are human beings with the same feelings they themselves have, that they are "souls," not "hands." Much of this new and healthy state of things is due to the fact that

THE WORKING MEN HAVE ORGANISED THEMSELVES

wisely and soberly in most cases to obtain recognition as *men*. Fanatics have put back the clock not

infrequently, extremists have alienated a good deal of sympathy which would otherwise have been theirs. But still progress has gone steadily forward, and to-day

THE WORKING MEN ARE A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH

—not as enemies to society or opponents of law and order, but as allies ; and no effort for the improvement of life and social conditions can be permanent which ignores them. Yet, while all this is true, most of us consider that

STRIKES ARE DEPLORABLE,

that very little permanent good comes from them, but a great amount of harm. Far too frequently they are engineered by men who are only paid agitators caring nothing for the men's welfare, and ignoring altogether the sufferings of the wives and children of the workers. Yet it is possible, even from bad things, to learn good lessons, and I want this afternoon to try and learn some from the Newcastle Coal Strike ; and the first I learn is

THE POWER OF A MULTITUDE

when properly organised and when imbued with one aim. History has taught us this lesson over and over again in the past ; we can learn the same to-day all around us, in every branch of work or of sport. The old motto on the Isle of Man coat-of-arms is true—“United we stand ; divided we fall.” Aye, men, what a power for good we should be if only we were united and were whole-hearted in the service of God ; if the words we often sing were really true :—

“One the object of our journey,
 One the faith which never tires,
 One the earnest looking-forward,
 One the hope our God inspires.”

All the hosts of hell, all the fiercest power of the devil could not hinder the work of a Church united in one great aim—God’s glory.

Our second lesson is that

WE MUST BE LOYAL TO A CAUSE IF WE WISH IT TO
 SUCCEED.

The men who have succeeded in life are the men who have been loyal and whole-hearted in their work; the causes, whether national or political, that have been successful are those whose adherents have been willing to die for them if necessary rather than be disloyal. It was this spirit of burning loyalty that gave to Switzerland its independence, and won for that nation the admiration of the world. Would to God we had it in the Churches to-day—would that we had it in ourselves as individuals, so that the cause of Christ in the world might be advanced and His kingdom extended. Our last lesson from the strike shall be

THE NEED OF A LEADER.

It would be premature to forecast the result of the agitation; every hour seems to bring fresh developments; but if the men should fail, if their demands are not conceded, it will in great measure be due to the lack of a strong, whole-hearted leader, absolutely true to their interests, and whole-hearted in their service—one who has made their cause his

own, and who will throw himself heart and soul into it. And, men, we need a Leader and a Guide for our life—we've realised it over and over again, haven't we? Many a fellow can thank God for the help and guidance he has had from his "missis"; but we need more than earthly help and love. The old Latin proverb—"Humanum est errare—to make mistakes is human"—is true of the best of us. And so we can rejoice that God Himself has promised to guide us along life's pathway, and help us in the "tight corners" when things are going all wrong—to give us power against the devil, and to stick to us through thick and thin. Try Him, men; enlist under His banner, look to Him as the Guide and Counsellor of your life, follow the path He has marked out for you, and, though it may be stony and at times dark, plod on, knowing He is Himself alongside, and by-and-bye we shall find that the road has led us "Home."

SENT FROM GOD.

"There was a man sent from God."—St. John i. 6.

THERE ARE two questions that are always interesting—"Where do we come from?" and "Where are we going?" Some folks love to talk of their genealogy, and if they can trace, or think they can, that their ancestors went over to England with William the Conqueror, then there is no holding them for conceit. A preacher once said, if we traced our ancestors far enough back we should find that we were all descended from a gardener who stole his Master's apples and got the sack! But our text gives us the true answer. Where do we come from?—

SENT FROM GOD.

God created man in His own image; He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul. Then God sent him into the world to work for his living, and in that daily toil to honour his Creator. How this adds dignity to life! I'm not afraid of men getting conceited or swollen heads over it. Rather I fear the opposite—that we don't realise enough the dignity of life and the high position God would have us fill. Man is not a mere atom or a feather blown about by every chance wind, but

MAN IS SENT FROM GOD,

and therefore God has a reason for the existence of every one of us, and a work for each of us to do that nobody else can do for us. Sometimes, bro-

thers, we get discouraged and depressed—we get fits of “the blues”—our lot is hard—circumstances seem to conspire together against us, and we feel we are not wanted. My brother, if you are feeling thus to-day, learn first of all that

GOD WANTS YOU.

He has sent you into the world to be His ambassador, and an ambassador's duty is

TO REPRESENT THE KING.

And we are called upon to represent our God in the world.

A traveller, speaking of a certain ambassador, once said, “If his King is anything like him, then I'd very much prefer not to know him.” And I fear this may be often said about us—we don't give a good representation of God to the world; and as we hear of the bitterness and party squabbles of professing Christians, we can well understand men of the world saying—“If the Christians' God is like them, we'd rather have nothing to do with Him.”

A Christian is the world's Bible or else the world's libel; men who never read the Bible read the lives of those who profess to be Christians, and judge God by what they see there. What do they see in *yours*, brother?

“A man sent from God.” If we realised this,

WE SHOULD BE FEARLESS.

We men are an awful set of cowards in religious matters. Many a man would charge the guns of an enemy without fear—would be absolutely fearless on

the battlefield—and yet would fly at the thought of bravely standing up for God among his comrades. Brothers, the King wants us; realise this day by day; and as you realise this your fear will depart and your life will be, not one of swagger or religious self-complacency, but one of dependence upon God, Who will give you the strength to witness for Him.

A second lesson goes hand-in-hand with this—viz., that a man sent from God realises

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF LIFE.

To many, “life is mostly froth and bubble”—getting as much enjoyment as possible out of it, with no thought of its responsibility, or of the fact that one day we shall have to give an account of how we have used it. It’s a solemn thing to die, but it’s a more solemn thing to *live*—to live in such a way that our influence may be for God and for truth.

Thou must be true thyself, if thou the truth wouldst teach,

Thy soul must overflow, if thou another’s soul wouldst reach.

It needs the overflow of heart to give the lips true speech;

Think truly, and thy thoughts shall the world’s famine feed.

Speak truly, and each word of thine shall be a fruitful seed;

Live truly, and thy life shall be a great and glorious creed.

Our last thought this afternoon shall be that the man who is sent from God shall

GO BACK TO GOD.

John's work was apparently not finished ; it seemed essential that he should remain ; but the Divine verdict was that "he had fulfilled his course"—he had done the work God sent him into the world to perform, and so he went back to God, to receive the reward of his faithful service. He was only a young man, but God judges not by years ; and when our work is done, whatever our age may be, we shall be called back to God to hand in our report, and to hear the Master's opinion as to how the work entrusted to us has been done. Let this knowledge, my brothers, nerve us to our responsibility and our privilege ; give us power to live here as those who represent our King, so that of us it may be said, as of John, "He was a man sent from God."

THE CALL OF THE FLAG ; OR, SHALL WE GIVE A DREADNOUGHT ?

"A land which the Lord thy God careth for."—
Deut. xi. 12.

WE ARE sometimes tempted to think that God, like some foolish earthly fathers, has favourites—not only favoured individuals upon whom He bestows special marks of approval, but favoured nations and empires, who in time look upon themselves as the special pets of God, and regard it as a right that they should have Divine mercies heaped upon them. And yet this is not really so ; it is only because we do not see *all*, and cannot understand God's purposes and plans, that at times it may *appear* so ; but one thing *is* true and unalterable, both as regards nations and individuals, that "to whom much is given, from them shall much be required." If this were true of any nation, it would certainly seem to be true of ours.

To quote the words of a modern writer, "The chronicles of the British Empire are the marvel of history" ; the position she has won in the world—won because "the secret of her greatness," to quote the words of Queen Victoria, "lies in the open Bible"—is a great and standing proof of the truth of those words, "Righteousness exalteth a nation," and causes her to be regarded as "a land which the Lord God careth for." In His plan of government

GOD ALWAYS WORKS BY HUMAN AGENCY

—He uses men's work to fulfil His purposes ; sometimes through some great disaster or catastrophe ; sometimes by the work of individuals ; at others by great waves of feeling and emotion, and of these perhaps

PATRIOTISM

is the greatest. "Patriotism," says a great Frenchman, "is the chief characteristic of the Britisher," and we rejoice that it is so, for patriotism is not excitement or emotionalism, not mere foam or ocean spray, but a deep, underlying current, so quiet that, in times of peace, we are hardly conscious of its existence, yet, in times of danger, it becomes a great and overwhelming flood, bearing all before it ; silently, and yet grandly omnipotent. People who don't know its thrilling power cannot understand it ; they fail to gauge the love we have for our native land ; they call it, as one of the newspaper correspondents did this last week, "panic and jingoism." But, brothers, it is this spirit which has made England ; the spirit of patriotism bearing fruit in human toil and service blessed by God. It has given us our grandest music ; it has inspired our poets. Shakespeare, fired by this spirit, has given us these grand lines :—

"England, bound in by the triumphant sea,
Whose rocky shores beat back the angry waves
Of watery Neptune.

This land of such dear souls, this dear, dear land,
Dear for her reputation through the world.

This royal throne of Kings, this sceptred isle,

This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,

This other Eden, demi-paradise,

This fortress built by Nature for herself

Against infection and the hand of war.
 This happy brood of men, this little world,
 This precious stone set in the silver sea,
 Which serves it in the office of a wall,
 Or as a moat defensive to a house,
 Against the envy of less happier lands.
 This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this Eng-
 land,
 This nurse, this teeming womb of kings,
 Feared by their breed, and famous by their birth,
 Renowned for their deeds abroad and home,
 For Christian service and true chivalry."

IT WAS THIS SPIRIT OF PATRIOTISM

which animated our forefathers when they drove
 back the Spanish Armada, that sent the Fiery Cross
 through Scotland, calling the clans to rally round
 the flag ; it was this that sent our soldiers under the
 Southern Cross to the battlefields of Egypt and
 South Africa ; and it is, my brothers, the same spirit
 that thrills us to-day—*not* the spirit of defiance to
 any other nation—"Defence, not defiance," is our
 motto—not objecting to other nations doing their
utmost to prepare against the onslaught of the foe—
 it is their *duty* as patriots to do this—but

AWAKE ALSO TO OUR OWN DUTY

—to the possibility, at least, of recent utterances and
 actions being threats, claiming our right—nay, our
 privilege,

TO HELP THE OLD MOTHER WHO BORE US,
 that she may find her sons, scattered round the

world, yet rallying to her side when danger threatens the old hearths and homes of our boyhood—rallying under the folds of the old flag of Empire, Brotherhood and Home.

THIS IS NOT PANIC,

not sentiment only, not the feeling of “blood, lust and jackals,” as stated at a recent meeting, but the conviction of men, earnest, sensible, thoughtful men, who, recognising that we have an equal share in our great Empire, are prepared to suffer, to deny ourselves—aye, and if need be, to die for that flag which is the symbol of freedom and of the great brotherhood of the British Empire, upon which the sun never sets—“A land which the Lord our God careth for,” and a nation bound by the golden chain of Empire, the links of which chain only hold the closer as distance increases or danger threatens.

THIS IS NOT THE PLACE TO DISCUSS POLITICAL DETAILS,

to decide whether we shall give a Dreadnought or increase our naval subsidy; but we rejoice at the enthusiasm aroused, at the determination that this enthusiasm shall find practical expression—be the action of the Federal Government what it may—for by this means, by the utmost preparedness for war, we are best able to ensure peace. But while we rejoice that the call of the flag has once again been responded to, we would not forget another call—

THE CALL OF GOD.

We scorn the men who refuse to respond to the call of the flag; we call them traitors and cowards. But

what about the men who refuse God's call—can we give them any other name? How ungrateful it is; how contemptible. God has given us here under the Southern sky a glorious land, won to our great Empire without the shedding of blood, or cruel war. Our lot might have been very different, our heritage less glorious had not God's blessing been upon our fathers' work. To us who enjoy this heritage, God calls; He appeals to our gratitude as we realise every good thing comes from above. Let us, brothers, respond to that call, hand in our allegiance to the great Captain of our Salvation, be patriotic citizens of God's kingdom, and fight manfully onward beneath the banner of the Cross until the bugle sounds the note of victory, and the battle has been won.

INFLUENCE.

"None of us liveth unto himself."—Rom. xiv. 7.

"WHETHER I'M a Christian or not concerns nobody but myself; it's entirely my own personal affair, and cannot possibly affect anybody else."

How often we hear this statement made, and yet it's one of the biggest lies the devil ever invented; and he has invented a good many in his time. Hasn't he?

I believe one of the most awful things in that great Day, when we stand before God's Judgment Seat, will be to see the lives led astray from God by wrong influences, and to find that many a fellow would have been very different if only our influence had been for God. A man was sentenced recently to seven years' imprisonment, and one went to sympathise with him in his prison cell. "Yes," said the prisoner, "it's terribly hard; but that's not the worst of it. The worst of all to bear is the knowledge that I've led my mate astray as well."

It's over nineteen hundred years since Saint Paul spoke the words of our text, and we still recognise their truth in physical matters, but not in spiritual things. A man with an infectious disease is isolated at once and kept away from his fellow men lest he should carry infection; and it's a terrible thing that

MEN TO-DAY ARE CARRYING MORAL INFECTION

through the world; others, by their presence and influence, are becoming infected too, and the world would be morally and socially better if they had never lived. It's a terrible thing to say, but it's

true, isn't it, brothers? Then I would remind you that it's

NOT ONLY THE GREAT WHO HAVE INFLUENCE.

"Of course," you say, "a King or a Prime Minister or a leader of men has a great influence; but I'm such an insignificant chap in this great universe that I don't count." Science tells us that's all rubbish, and that everything in the world—be it large or small, important or otherwise—does exert influence—unwittingly possibly, frequently unknowingly, and yet very really. One tiny grain of iodine colours one thousand times its weight of water. Throw a stone into a large pond, and the influence of its splash is seen until it reaches the opposite side. Move a switch on the line an inch or so, the train is thrown off the rails, and a great and appalling railway disaster results. And it will be a terrible discovery men, to find in that day of handing in our account that we are "off the line." Only a little thing at the start, but gradually we have followed the wrong line, and it has led us farther and farther away from the safe track, and at last comes the crash, and we wake up to find ourselves—*lost*.

Another thought is that

OUR INFLUENCE ARISES FROM WHAT WE REALLY ARE,

and not from what we seem. We live in a great advertising age. A comic parody has it that—

Life is real, life is earnest,

And the man who hopes to rise

To success in any calling,

Must expect to advertise,

and very often the advertisements are the best thing about the goods we have purchased. They are well

"boomed"—a great profession has been made of the good qualities they were supposed to possess, but they are often absolutely rotten. So with religion. It is fashionable in some quarters to make a profession of religion. Sometimes it's a good advertisement to our business to be seen in church on a Sunday; but, alas! very often the "professors of religion are not the possessors of it," and therefore their influence is bad and evil. We've been often deceived by such, and it's comparatively easy to deceive our fellow-men; but

WE CAN'T DECEIVE GOD.

God sees beneath the outward cloak, and knows exactly our true value and our true influence. Now, I believe that all of us would like to exert a good influence—an influence for God in the world; but

INFLUENCES FOR GOD CAN ONLY COME FROM ABOVE.

Some folks seem to have a notion that Christ offers eternal life as a prize. If we are good and say our prayers and attend church regularly, we shall be rewarded hereafter by the prize of eternal life. Suppose you were ill, you wouldn't think much of the doctor who told you, "you must get rid of that pain, and then I'll give you a tonic." You would say to him, "How on earth can I get rid of it? I want you to cure it." And, men, we can't get rid of our bad influences ourselves; and so Christ the great Physician comes to see us and offers us His divine medicine, his strength to cure us, and to forgive us what is past, and then His presence and help to live for God and for our fellow men. Use His prescription men, and you'll find in that great Day to your joy that you haven't lived to yourself, but have been able to lead others to follow the Christ you have tried to serve.

LESSONS FROM "THE CUP."

"So run that ye may obtain."—I Cor. ix. 24.

FROM BAD things it is possible to learn good lessons, and whatever our opinions may be about the great racing carnival just ended, it is, I think, possible to learn some lessons from it that may be helpful to us in our lives. Lesson number one shall be from the

INTENSE INTEREST AROUSED.

Telegrams were flying all over Australia—nay, all over the world—wireless messages were intercepting our ships in mid-ocean—the English, American, and Continental papers will give full accounts of the great race; and yet the result—comparatively speaking—affects only a few. Now Christianity, if true, affects every man, woman, and child that has ever lived or will live. It affects them not only for a time or for this life, but for eternity; and yet the world at large takes very little real interest in it. Oh, men! be keen for Christ; take an interest in His work, and you will be able to do something to help your brother men, and make this world of ours brighter and better.

Lesson number two shall be one of

WHOLE-HEARTEDNESS.

The "crooks" and other swindlers are not worthy of notice; but we think of those who "run on the square"—the whole-hearted owners, trainers, and jockeys, who mean to win. They realise it will be a hard fight, but they set their whole heart on the task, and leave no stone unturned to achieve their

desire. Oh, men! MEAN to win heaven—set your whole heart and determination on it—be deadly in earnest about it, and you'll find yourself victorious at last. Lesson number three is that

LONG PREPARATION IS NECESSARY

before success can be obtained. For weeks the trainers have been carefully training and preparing their horses—everything at all likely to hinder them has been laid aside—special food has been given—the horses have been carefully watched day and night, and thus they were able to stay the pace and finish the course. Many a fellow expects to be perfect, or almost so, without any preparation at all. He is full of zeal and enthusiasm at first, and fancies he is strong and able to resist all the attacks of the devil. Then temptation comes—suddenly, unexpectedly, as ninety-nine out of every hundred temptations do come, and he falls, and then feels discouraged and inclined to throw it all up. Stick at it; men; nothing worth having is easy; the Melbourne Cup isn't run without long preparation; and the Christian race isn't run without plenty of preliminary falls and disappointments; but the great Trainer will gradually train and fit you so that running successfully you may obtain the prize that fadeth not away.

Lesson number four is that there is

A GREAT SETTLING DAY.

after the race. At school we always called Monday "Black Monday," because that was the day the weekly reports were presented to the Head Master and we got whacked if we needed it, or if he thought we did—we never agreed with him on this! And there is many a Black Monday for the betting man—many a fellow ruined on "Settling Day"; and the sequel is not infrequently seen in the police court

when, unable to pay, he embezzles from his employer and finds himself sentenced to a term of imprisonment. There is a great Settling Day coming, men, for each of us—a day when we shall have to give an account of how we have used that which has been entrusted to us, of what we have done with the life lent to us. Men, what sort of an account will yours be? Will you be able to meet your debts, and pay God all you owe Him—or rather hand in Christ's receipts for the debt which He paid for you—or will you be a defaulter, and as such be struck off the roll?

Our last lesson is

THE REMORSE OF THE LOSERS.

It's better to keep away from a man who has lost heavily on a race! Losers blame the horses, the jockey, the weather, the position of the horse, and anything else they can think of; yet many a fellow in his quiet moments blames himself. "What a silly fool I was. It's a 'mug's' game, after all." So it is, men, and so thousands to-day have found it, who, had they kept clear of the betting-ring, would have been in good positions, and respectable citizens, instead of being full of remorse and outcasts from decent society. But the remorse of this life is as nothing compared with the remorse which will attend the men in the next, who, being shut out from God's presence, and from the company of Heaven, will have only themselves to blame, and whose cry from a broken heart will be, "What a fool I was."

Don't be fools, brothers, but as sensible men face the facts, realise that the only way to obtain forgiveness and happiness hereafter is through Christ—that these can be had for the asking. Availing yourselves of the pardon He offers, claim from Him the power necessary, and "Run with patience the race set before you," and pass the Judge's box "a winner."

THE COMING OF THE FLEET.

"Once in three years came the navy of Tarshish, bringing gold."—1 Kings x. 22.

THE ADVENT of the United States Fleet to our shores is a great event, not to Australia alone, but to the whole British Empire—an event which may have important and far-reaching consequences. Two great Christian nations, holding between them the command of the Pacific, surely ought to be a great influence for peace and righteousness and God in the world. God grant that we may prove worthy of the trust reposed in us; and while we welcome heartily our visitors, yet let us remember that we are Christians. But there are personal as well as national lessons to be learnt from this unique visit.

AS WE THINK OF THE GREAT FLEET COMING HUNDREDS OF MILES,

bearing their thousands of sailors, we think of the greater fleet of human beings on the ocean of life borne along—whither? To the eternal harbour, or towards the rocks of destruction?

EVERYONE IN THAT GREAT COMPANY HAS HIS OWN IDENTITY.

There is no getting lost in the crowd; every man is on the roll; none are overlooked. Remember, brothers, none of us are too insignificant for God to take an interest in—none of us are overlooked or forgotten—every name is on God's roll.

THE FLEET

of Hiram, mentioned in our text,

BROUGHT GOLD

—the fleet of the United States brings cargo of greater value—namely, the

SOULS OF MEN.

The gold was for the King's palace. And this is the true destiny of humanity—"to adorn the eternal palace of the King of kings"—not to live as dwellers in back slums, amid the dark and gloomy shadows of life, but in the sunlight of the King's presence, and as members of His royal house.

GREAT CARE IS NECESSARY IN PREPARING FOR THE
VOYAGE OF SO GREAT A FLEET.

Every ship was carefully prepared and provisioned—Fancy catering for a host like that! They'd eat more than we do at our men's socials!—and every forethought was taken for the voyage.

FATHERS,

see to it that your

BOYS ARE PREPARED

for the voyage of life before starting out alone. Fit them out thoroughly; tell them of the dangers and rocks ahead—far better warn them before than thrash them afterwards—it may mean trouble, it may be difficult and involve self-denial; but, oh, men, it's worth while—worth while to help a lad to keep straight and save him from becoming a wreck upon the rocks scattered so freely over life's ocean.

Another lesson is that there is

A GREAT COMMANDER OVER ALL

—one who has absolute power and who expects absolute obedience. “Sailors,” as one once said to me, “don’t worry ; they obey orders.” What a help this would be if we realised it more in our lives—that the great Captain was over all and ordered all things in accordance with His supreme will ; and therefore all that comes is by His command. Life would be freer of worry, and the burdens and trials of daily toil would be lightened and our happiness increased tenfold. Our last lesson shall be connected with their

SAFE ARRIVAL INTO HARBOUR.

It was a grand sight to see them entering the Heads, gliding safely through dangerous channels, because the pilot was on board. They could not have got in without him—he was on the look out, and at once went to them and guided them safely into the harbour. A French vessel, the other day, was wrecked outside one of our harbours just as she seemed to have reached safety, because she had no pilot on board. And, brothers, if we want to enter the eternal harbour when the voyage of life is over, it is absolutely necessary to have the great Pilot on board. He is ever on the look out for vessels of the souls of men, so let us signal for Him to come aboard, to take charge of our life, put ourselves under His orders, and we shall find at last, as the United States Fleet found, that the Pilot has guided us safely into harbour, and landed us in the ‘glory land’ of our song.

THE FOOTBALL FINAL.

“*Striving for the mastery*” (R.V. in the games).—
1 Cor. ix. 25.

ONE OF the characteristics of Christ was that He used the common events of daily life to draw lessons of help, encouragement and warning for his hearers; and so to-day we can learn some lessons from the great football final about which so much interest has been aroused—lessons which will help us in our Christian lives, and make us better fellows and more ready to “play the game.” There is far too much of making Christianity a relic of long ago—like some mummy in a museum—instead of applying it to daily life. Life as we know it, especially life in Australia, has two parts—work and play; and I for one believe that all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. Life would be far jollier if we worked hard, played hard, and prayed hard.

Now for our lessons from the football field and from that grand old game—let those decry it who will—that has done not a little to create and strengthen British pluck and endurance.

Lesson number one shall be that old, familiar one—

UNION IS STRENGTH.

Full backs, halves, “ruck men,” and all are working together as one for the success of the team, because they know that jealousy, selfishness, and hatred are fatal to success. How different to the Christian team—no union, no united action, but jealousy,

squabbles, self-interest, frequently, alas, mar our success and instead of playing the game for the great Christian team, we play it for ourselves, our own praise and glory, or the success of our little party, and we jolly well ought to be hissed off the field.

Lesson number two is fully recognised by all athletes—namely, that

TRAINING IS NECESSARY.

Heaven is the goal that I believe every man has in front of him, and he hopes somehow to get there. To reach the goal in any sport a fellow must train or he can't succeed. And to reach heaven we must train here for it. Many a man if he reached heaven to-night would want to be out of it in the morning, because he is not trained for it—he is out of sympathy with its aims, its work, and its inhabitants. Isn't it true, men, that many live for the devil here, train and train hard, and thus become proficient in his service, and yet expect heaven hereafter? Nobody but a fool would play in a big match without training, and nobody but a fool can hope to get to heaven unless he is trained here for it.

A third lesson shall be that a good footballer, and one of use to his side,

MUST BE WHOLE-HEARTED

—his whole interest wrapped up in his team. He glories in being able to wear their "colours," and if the match is hard and the fight strenuous he is only stirred up to play all the harder; opposition only arouses his best qualities, and he performs feats of which he never dreamed himself capable. "Hard pounding this, gentlemen," Wellington is reported to have said to his men at Waterloo, as he rode

through their lines ; “ we’ll see who can pound the longest.” Isn’t there a lesson for us here, men ? We profess to be Christians, to be members of Christ’s team, and yet how half-hearted we often are—how ashamed of our colours—how easily we “ throw it all up ” if we have opposition, instead of “ bucking up,” and pegging away all the harder.

Again, we learn that a team

MUST STRIVE LAWFULLY

—they must obey rules, however stupid they may appear, or else be disqualified. And, my brothers, Christ has given us rules ; He has laid commands upon us—no sneaking into His team by the back door—no skulkers on His side—no scoring by foul tactics. Are we willing, men, to obey our Captain—to accept the terms He offers for playing on His side ? If not, there’ll be no recognition of us as one of the players, we won’t be picked in the Heavenly team, and we shall leave the field disgraced, defeated, and alone.

Our last lesson shall be this—

MANY SHOTS GO NEAR THE GOAL, AND YET FAIL.

A man gets the ball, and, dodging under arms and twisting himself free from his opponents, he darts like lightning towards the goal—he has a grand chance to score, but as he nears the goal line he kicks and misses ! and a groan of disappointment arises from the spectators, who were just ready to cheer him for his brilliant run. How often is this seen in life ! A young fellow starts off with brilliant chances before him ; he eludes one obstacle after another ; he outstrips his companions, and then, just as success is within his reach, he fails, and sinks

back among the multitude—a disappointment to himself and his friends. How frequently, too, is this found with regard to religion. A splendid fellow, a “straight-goer,” *but*——. Great attainments, great respect for religion, moral, upright, and yet no thought of God, no recognition of God’s claims upon his life, no willingness to join His team ; and so, at the critical moment, when the end of his brilliant life is near, whatever the world may say or think, he stands in the eyes of God, “*a failure*,” and, unnoticed and uncared for, leaves the field alone. Men, see to it first of all that you are enrolled on the side of Christ and Christianity, and then, in His strength and with His Spirit, with the esprit de corps for His service that a footballer has for his side, play the game until the whistle sounds, and we hear from our great Captain, “Well played ; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

FITS OF THE BLUES.

"Be not afraid or dismayed by reason of this great multitude, for the battle is not your's, but God's."—2 Chron. xx. 15.

OLIVER CROMWELL'S soldiers, before commencing their battles, used to join in singing the Old Hundredth; and whatever opinions we have of him and some of the actions of his followers, it must have been a solemn and inspiring sight to see those hardy old soldiers praying to their God before the fight.

Cromwell's army is not the only one that has sung praises on the battlefield. Three thousand years before, Jehoshaphat and his army on the eve of battle called upon their God. Their leader rallied them by the remembrance of God's promised help, and, in the words of the text, exhorted them to "be not afraid or dismayed by reason of the great multitude, for the battle was not theirs, but God's." And this inspired them, and gave them courage to go and fight bravely for their king and nation.

IT'S A REMARKABLE THING HOW MEN CALL UPON GOD
IN DISTRESS.

Jehoshaphat and his army were in what we should call "a blue funk," and so they began to pray; and all through the ages men have been doing the same thing. When the Spanish Armada hove in sight in the days of Elizabeth, the church bells of old England pealed forth their warning, and the people flocked to prayer. When plague or disaster falls upon a people, a Day of Prayer is set aside, and we unite, because of our distress and fear, in praying to God.

Perhaps some of us have been in a storm at sea;

things looked very bad, and we felt we were going to be smashed up and drowned. What did we do? We prayed. Aye, and we vowed that if God spared us we would be different fellows for the future. Or sickness entered our homes—our loved ones were laid upon what we feared might be a death-bed, and we prayed, oh, so earnestly, and God heard and spared the life we prayed for. Or we have been ill ourselves, and in the silence of the sick-room or in the wakeful hours of the night, we prayed and vowed if God would only spare us, for the future we would serve Him. God answered our prayer; but what about all those vows? Have we kept them—isn't it true that gradually the impression wore off, and we have gone back to the old life and shut God out? If men acted thus in worldly things, they'd be called "cads." And yet we treat God thus, and still call ourselves "*men*!"

Another lesson we gather from the incident of our text is that

GOD IS OFTEN ON THE SIDE OF THE FEW.

It was so with Jehoshaphat. There was a great alliance of kings against him—his own army seemed very small in comparison; but

GOD DOESN'T GOVERN THE WORLD BY MAJORITIES.

The odds were all in favour of Ahab and the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel, but Elijah, who appeared single-handed before them, won, because God was on his side. It seemed a dead certainty that the three men cast into the burning fiery furnace in Babylon would soon be burnt to cinders, but not a hair was singed, because God was on their side. The work of the Apostles seemed absolutely hopeless—nay, it looked like madness and reckless risking of life to go on preaching Christ's message after His Crucifixion; yet those few brave men persevered, and to-

day, as a result of their work Christianity is the greatest power in the world. Remember, men, numbers make no difference to God. If we have Him on our side, though ten thousand are against us, we are sure to win.

MOST OF THE GREAT MOVEMENTS THAT HAVE BENEFITED THE WORLD HAVE BEEN IN THE MINORITY.

The great work of the Sunday Schools, now world-wide, was started by one man—Robert Raikes; the great Methodist movement was begun by a small band of Oxford students amidst great opposition. The Salvation Army has grown, in spite of fierce opposition, to be a world-wide organisation, started amidst abuse and persecution by a brave man and his saintly wife. The Temperance movement has spread throughout the world, started by little companies of people hopelessly in the minority. So it was with the Abolition of Slavery; so it was with the Oxford Movement; so it was in the days of Wickliffe and his monks; and so it is to-day, as we look around at some of the great social and religious movements in our midst. Men, these things ought to encourage us in our oftentimes lonely fight against sin. We often feel discouraged, and get "fits of the blues." Christianity seems in the minority; the world at large doesn't care much for it; our own falls are so very frequent that we are sometimes tempted to give it all up. Some children were playing games, and a little kiddie of about seven was asked which side she would be on, and her answer was, "I'll be on the side that wins." So, men, to-day be on the winning side. Take heart to-day from our text, and go back into life's battle with renewed earnestness and determination, remembering that the battle is not ours, but God's, and, if we obey His orders, victory is certain.

TEMPTATION.

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation."—
James i. 12.

EVERY ONE of us here to-day knows what temptation is; every man since the days of Adam knows it, and the sooner a fellow finds it out the better. We've got to meet temptation, but it's one thing to be tempted, another thing to fall. And one of the most precious things we read of in Christ's life is the fact that He also was tempted, and therefore He understands what it means, and can sympathise with us in it. But, you say,

WHY SHOULD WE BE TEMPTED?

It's not fair for God to put us in the world with a nature prone to do evil, and then let us be exposed to temptation. There are many things we could say in answer to this objection; but I want this afternoon not so much to try and answer objections as to state facts. And fact number one shall be

WE ARE TEMPTED BECAUSE THERE IS A DEVIL.

We have got to face this. I don't say that there is a being going about with a long tail breathing out sulphur, but I *do* say that whether the devil is a person or only an influence, there are ample signs of the presence of evil in the world. Some tell us the devil is chained up. If he is, he has an uncommonly long chain, and does a vast amount of mischief, and had better be muzzled as well! But, men,

we want to get hold of another fact along with this—viz., that

THE DEVIL ONLY HAS A LIMITED POWER.

Christ defeated him, and he is a wounded foe. But he is none the less dangerous because of this. A wounded enemy is often more fierce and wild and bitter in his attacks than one who isn't wounded; so don't despise or make light of his assaults. The raw recruit rushes headlong into battle, but the old veteran hesitates because he knows the horror of war. And the veteran Christian knows the awfulness of temptation, and therefore prepares himself to resist it with all his might.

Fact number two shall be

GOD ALLOWS US TO BE TEMPTED IN ORDER TO STRENGTHEN US.

A man can't be a good sailor until he has experienced a storm—if you never go outside the Heads, you'll never be able to call yourself "an old salt." And a man can't be a good, strong Christian until he has been tested. It's easy when all goes well and we are amidst congenial surroundings. But God doesn't want "hot-house Christians"—puny, undeveloped weaklings—He wants *men*, and so He allows us to be tempted and tested to develop the strength and character that lie dormant within. Swords, before they are sent out from the factory, are tested and bent nearly double to try them and prove what they are made of. The plates of the Dreadnought, and of all our ships, are tested to find out if they are perfect and will stand the fire of an enemy; and so with our Christian character and life. God allows it to be tested so that it may be developed and strengthened and prepared to receive the attacks of the

enemy. Don't go, therefore, and say that temptation is a sign of God's anger—nothing of the kind; sometimes it's just the opposite—temptations have proved our greatest help, and we have proved the text true, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation."

But if we have to meet it,

WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO TACKLE IT?

And first, I would say, *admit our failure*. Let's be honest in the matter, and confess that many and many a time we *need* not have given way. Don't shelter behind the excuse, "I couldn't help it"—you *could*, and you know it. Confess, then, to God your failures in the past, and let the remembrance of them arouse you to a more whole-hearted determination to resist for the future. Secondly, I would say, *avoid it* as much as possible; don't put yourselves needlessly in the way of temptation. An old legend tells of one asking the devil how he could have been so vile as to ruin an innocent, gentle girl, and his reply was "She came on to my ground." Don't go on the devil's ground, men, if you can help it; but if duty calls you there, then, before you start, arm yourselves from head to foot—"put on the *whole* armour of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."

Our last lesson is this—

THAT WE NEVER NEED BE ALONE IN TEMPTATION.

Sometimes the devil comes and tempts us in a crowd, and because others yield we do too, and follow like a lot of silly sheep; at other times he comes when we are alone, and whispers into our ears his vile suggestions, and, because we are alone, and because some-

times we feel nobody cares, we yield and fall into sin. The fire of temptation is hot, and we soon realise that the chains are round us, and we are in the midst of it. Three young fellows were in olden times thrown bound into the midst of a fiery furnace, but there drew near to them a fourth, and "the form of the fourth was like the Son of God." Oh, men, don't despair because of past failures, don't give up however lonely your lot, or however fierce the fire; ask for the company, the help, the strength of the Son of God, and realise that, as you lean upon Him, something of His power will take possession of you, and in that strength you will be able to resist successfully, and will earn the commendation of our text, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation."

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

—James iv. 14.

WHAT'S THE good of it? What's it worth? This is the great question of the age in every walk of life—the apprentice, the student, the scientist—all endure hardships and self-denial for what they hope to reap by-and-bye. So we can ask the same question of religion. What's the good of it? What's it worth? And the first answer I give is that Christianity gives a fellow

DELIVERANCE FROM THE TYRANNY OF SIN.

Many a man is prevented from being a Christian by the fear of falling. Sin is very powerful, and with this knowledge—often gained, alas, by bitter experience—he fears he might give way to temptation, and bring dishonour upon Christianity. Every honest man must respect such a fellow just as much as he must loathe and despise the hypocrite, who, while professing to be very good, and religious, is yet living a life of sin.

But, men, if the Gospel only offered us pardon for past sins it would be a very poor kind of thing. We want something more, and that is

POWER FOR THE PRESENT AND FUTURE.

Now God never does things by halves—He doesn't simply pull a man out of sin and then leave Him to shift for himself, but he gives him a new force of character, a new strength, renovating, purifying, and

ennobling his life. If a man fell into a river and was nearly drowning, you wouldn't think much of his rescuer if he pulled him out and laid him on the bank and then left him to get along as best he could. And yet, isn't that the notion we have of Christ? He'll give us pardon if we ask Him, but won't help a fellow to keep straight or to get strong afterwards. Some of you men know the power of a wife or your "best girl" to keep you straight. When the devil comes along to tempt you, you feel, "I can't do it; *she* wouldn't like it," and the memory of a good woman's love and trust seems to be a protecting arm round you giving you strength. So it is with Christ. If you'll only let Him He will come along on the other side when the devil is one side of you, and He will give you power and strength to overcome. He did it in the olden days, when, amidst all the sin and evil,

ENOCH WALKED WITH GOD.

He did it with Abraham, who became the friend of God. He did it in Babylon with those three men in the fiery furnace, and He will do it to-day to those who ask Him, so that we can go along as *inspired men*—men breathed into by the Divine power and strength; and living a life free from the tyranny of sin.

Try it and see for yourselves, men, whether God is to be relied on or not. A second lesson is that

CHRIST GIVES A PURPOSE TO LIFE.

What is your life? Many a man, if he answered truly, would have to admit that his life was simply a drifting aimlessly down the stream of time; no fixed purpose, no high ideals, no longings for better

things—bored with the amusements offered, satiated with gaiety, and saying, as a young man once remarked, “It’s all a beastly bore, but it helps to pass the time.” What a picture! What a life! Purposeless, aimless, wasted, lost! A little child was sitting with her lap full of flowers, by a swiftly-flowing stream, and idly she dropped first one and then another of her flowers into the water until, unconsciously, she threw the last away, and then, waking up to what she had done, she cried, “Oh, my flowers, my beautiful flowers, they are all gone.”

By the side of the stream of life we aimlessly sit, and one by one the golden opportunities lying in our path are thrown away until we wake up with a start to cry, “Lost, lost, lost! The golden opportunities of my life—they are gone, all gone, for ever!” Oh, men, have a purpose in life, and see to it that you are wide awake to that purpose ere the golden hours glide away.

Further, Christ not only gives a purpose to life, but

HE ALSO GIVES A MAN HOPE.

Have you ever tried to imagine what life would be like without hope? It is one of the greatest, if not *the* greatest power in the world. It is hope that fills the student as he pores long hours over his books; it is hope that inspires the apprentice or the workman; it is hope that keeps a fellow at office drudgery day after day—

THE HOPE OF A GOOD TIME COMING.

And we Christians can look forward with hope to the good time ahead. We have God’s promise of a time of joy and happiness when sin shall be no more, and with this hope ahead we will ring out the old,

the bad, the hopeless, and ring in the new, the good,
the joyous message of the Christ to men. And with
one long united pull at the bell-rope, ring in the
jubilee of God on earth.

Ring out the want, the care, the sin,
The faithless coldness of the times ;
Ring out, ring out my mournful rhymes
But ring the fuller minstrel in.
Ring out false pride in place and blood,
The civic slander and the spite ;
Ring in the love of truth and right,
Ring in the common love of good.
Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand ;
Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be.

THE DESERTING SAILORS.

"He returned with shame of face to his own land."
2 Chron. xxxii. 21.

APPEARANCES WERE all in favour of Sennacherib; the betting would have been on his success. He had devastated the country and captured forty-six cities, and was feeling very elated and proud; and, therefore, we can understand his taunts and sneers. But though he could taunt man with impunity,

HE COULD NOT TAUNT GOD.

God's messenger appeared on the scene with this terrible message, "God hath put a hook to thy nose and a bridle to thy lips," and he was sent back home in disgrace, and murdered by his own family. We can imagine something of what Sennacherib must have felt on that return journey—how ashamed and mortified; how terrible to be regarded as unworthy of his country. I fear others since then have felt the same. And many of the American sailors who deserted their ships are doubtless feeling the same to-day. Their flag and country called them, and gladly they responded; they joined the company of brave men, and were honoured as such themselves, but to-day they are deserters—men who in war time would be shot—punishment is waiting for them, a reward offered for their arrest, and they are branded as deserters. My brothers, I fear there are

PLENTY OF DESERTERS FROM GOD

—men who enrolled under His banner; His Cross

was marked on their brows at baptism ; many were admitted to Confirmation, and vowed to be Christ's faithful soldiers and servants unto their lives' end, and yet to-day they are posted by the great Admiral of the fleet as deserters. The same reasons that caused the American sailors to desert very often have caused men to desert Christ.

THEY WERE TIRED OF THE MONOTONY

—*dissatisfied*—they wanted more liberty, and thought they'd have "a spree," and as they perhaps saw the ships sailing away they would realise that the game hadn't been worth the candle ; already they were tired of it, and wished they were on board again, and yet they were afraid to go back. And isn't it true that very often men desert from Christ because they are dissatisfied ? They had hoped that Christianity was going to be more to them than it has been—they would have more happiness and joy in Christ's service—that they would be stronger to resist temptation ; and because they have fallen they have become dissatisfied and discontented, and finally have deserted altogether, and yet to-day they are more, far more, dissatisfied than ever—no real happiness—no peace of mind—afraid to think of the future—miserable, wretched deserters.

Again, these sailors deserted because they were

TEMPTED BY SO-CALLED FRIENDS

to remain on shore. Perhaps they fell in love—or thought they did—with some girls, who told them they were "the only pebbles on the beach," who promised them all sorts of pleasures and fun if they remained. "Stay here and make your fortunes, and don't go and shut yourselves up on those old ships again where

you've got to work like niggers." And so they yielded—they consented to do what they knew to be wrong because of their friends. How frequently have we done the same! We know we ought to be serving God, but our so-called friends came along and jeered at us—they persuaded us to wait a bit, to have more of a fling in the world before becoming a Christian, and we yielded, and to-day are still with our friends and apart from Christ.

A closing lesson shall be that the sailors

ARE AFRAID TO GO BACK.

It would have been easy at first—they could have pleaded they had missed the train or tram, or got drunk and been locked up; but every day made it harder to return, and now they daren't go back at all.

What a parable of life's experiences this is. It is easy to become a Christian when young. The lessons of our Sunday School days and our mother's prayers seemed so real then; but the years have brought difficulties, and it's far harder now. So many other things have come between, and we have neglected God so long that we are afraid to go back to Him. Oh, men! if there is one thing God wants it is that this fear be laid aside. The great Father stands with outstretched arms to welcome the prodigal—to receive those who have stayed away for years from the old home and family circle. Come back then to Him with all the stains of your wandering and desertion upon you. Come back, confessing, as the Prodigal did, your sin, and you will find the Father will put His arms around you, and His heart as well as your own will be glad as you hear Him cry, "Rejoice with Me, for this My son was dead and is alive again—he was lost, and is found."

KING EDWARD VII.

"A man greatly beloved."—Dan. x. 19.

WE MEET here to-day, my brothers of the United Friendly Societies, at our annual service, under a great cloud of sorrow. Our welcome is, however, none the less hearty—shall I say it is even more so—because a common sorrow draws us nearer to each other. Death comes into our midst, and as we are thus reminded of human frailty, we crave for friendship and brotherhood and the clasp of a strong hand in ours. Friendly Societies exist—or should do—for this purpose, and so, therefore, to-day I trust that under one common bond of sorrow we may more fully realise the meaning of Brotherhood, and what societies such as ours stand for. And I thought it right that we should have a *Men's Memorial Service*—the general one will come later—to-day is peculiarly our own—a men's memorial and tribute to a fellow man. Removed from us by court etiquette and the chance of birth, beneath the purple there has been ever visible the heart of a *man*, and it is

BECAUSE OF HIS MANLINESS

we have learnt to love him. Like us, he has not been exempt from sorrow and bereavement; he has known sickness and loss, and at last there has come to him that moment that is certain to come to us all when earth and earthly things must be left behind, and we must answer the Master's roll-call. On occasions like this, men, it is therefore only fitting that we should meet and pay our respects to the illustrious dead—to express our sympathy with the Queen-Mother in her sore trial, and to join our prayers with all parts of our vast Empire for our new Sovereign, King George V.

But we meet, not in any emotional or sentimental way, not to flatter our dead monarch, but to try and learn some lessons that will help us—inspired by the example he has set us—to be better men. One of the chief traits in King Edward's character was

THE REALISATION OF HIS RESPONSIBILITY.

We can recall the feelings of anxiety when he ascended the throne. Queen Victoria had set such a high standard throughout her long reign that we feared it would be impossible for a new King to reach it. King Edward himself shared this feeling, and his addresses and speeches at the opening of his all-to-short reign breathe the spirit of hopefulness, yet mixed with fear, lest that high standard might be lowered. We can say to-day that those hopes of the new King have been all fulfilled, and that is not a small thing to say of one whose every word and action has to be carefully weighed, because not infrequently the fate of nations is hanging on them. Yet King Edward succeeded far above any expectations entertained of him, and succeeded because in the first place he realised the responsibility of life and the importance of living. Our positions are far less public—greatly inferior in many respects. Yet, men, each of us has a solemn responsibility resting upon us—to our *nation*, because the manner of the individual lives of its citizens makes for the future peace and prosperity of our land; to our *children*, that they may be properly trained and fitted for the future, not by our lips only, but by our lives; and to *ourselves*, remembering always that the life we live is a life only lent to us, and upon which one day we must give account.

Another feature of our late King's life was

HIS WILLINGNESS TO SERVE.

Right royally has he carried out not the letter only but also the spirit of his motto as Prince of Wales, "Ich dien." The days are gone by for ever when kings can oppress their subjects—the despotism of an absolute monarch is buried in the grave of the centuries. Gradually, quietly, and yet surely, there has crept in the great constitutional government which has blessed and prospered our nation, and been the surest safeguard of the throne.

King Edward—as did his mother before him—accepted this modern spirit, and laboured long and spent his energy and strength, even in the last few hours of his life, in serving his people. Would there were more like him ; would that all our leaders, whether statesmen, politicians, soldiers, or whatever they may be called, would imitate this great example, and work only for the people's good.

Another great trait that stands out in the late King's life is his

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GOD'S CLAIM AND POWER.

How different from the tone of ancient kings—aye, even from the spirit of some modern rulers—has ever been the keynote of the late King. No empty boasting, no vain egotism, but ever an acknowledgment of the Higher Power behind a throne, guiding and overruling all the deliberations of the King and his counsellors for the carrying out His purposes of love to the world. And, my brothers, let us take away this lesson this afternoon, that God has a great plan for our lives—He has a claim upon them ; and let us, inspired by the King's example, ever recognise this fact, and so be willing to put ourselves into God's hands that we may help forward His divine plan, and may be to God what King Edward was to his people, "A man greatly beloved."

THE FINAL TEST MATCH.

"Let us play the men."—2 Sam. x. 12.

I'M A great believer in sport of all kinds, so long as it's all "on the square," and if some of our young fellows would play themselves instead of being content to be merely spectators, there would be a far healthier moral tone in the world than there is at present. A true athlete is as a rule a straight goer, a clean living man, and his influence as such must be for good among his fellows. Perhaps cricket is the cleanest of all sports, and I for one rejoice at these test matches, because

THEY BRING TWO COUNTRIES INTO TOUCH

with each other, and help each to understand the other. And right here, men, I see a lesson sticking out, and it is this—that the man who "plays the game" for Christ here brings heaven and earth into closer touch and helps to abolish that horrible idea that heaven is only a future state quite independent of this life. Heaven ought to begin for a man here in this world.

THE FINAL TEST MATCH.

There is something to my mind very solemn in that word "final." In the other matches a fellow may have made a "duck," or got a "pair of spectacles," or made a hash of fielding, and dropped catches, but he looks forward to the Final as an opportunity of retrieving his character as a cricketer, and he plays very carefully, because it's his last chance. I don't

know when it will be for any of us, but this I do know, that some time or another we have our last chance. God speaks to us for the last time—calls us to give Him our lives—offers us another opportunity—how many some of us have had!—and then says as He said of Ephraim, “Let him alone,” he has had his last chance.

Now

A MATCH SIGNIFIES OPPONENTS,

and a good sportsman—be he a cricketer or footballer, or rowing man, or whatever he is—will never underrate their strength. Sometimes in cricket matches we have seen this done, when a member of the apparently stronger team took things too easily and was bowled out for a duck, to his great disgust and the delight of his opponents. And we’ve got to recognise in life that we have opponents ever anxious to bowl us out—some of the balls they send come along like “Cotter’s lightning,” others are slow breaks or “googlies”—some we can cut for four, others beat us entirely and scatter our timbers. Every “over” has six balls, and we can class the attacks of the devil under six heads—viz., Intemperance, Immorality, Scepticism, Indifference, Excuses, Religious Profession, and the men who are bowled out generally succumb to one of these “balls.” Then, too,

BOWLERS HAVE AGENTS,

or “fielders,” whose part it is to catch us out; and the devil has plenty of agents in the world who try by indirect attacks to get our wicket. It is often these indirect attacks that are so hard to meet. We can play the bowler, but it’s the man at point or in the slips or long field that gets us out over and over again. He looks so pleasant and smiling that we

feel compelled to "spoon up a catch." And the most difficult game for the Christian to play is defending himself against these indirect attacks—these enemies that often appear so pleasant and attractive that we yield to them, and before we realise it we are "out." Then

THE BATSMEN HAVE TO DEFEND THREE WICKETS,

and every Christian has to do the same. The three wickets entrusted to him are Faith, Hope, and a Good Conscience. *Faith*—how essential this is in ordinary commercial life. The grocer fills his shop with groceries because he has faith that he'll sell them. The merchant buys large quantities of goods because he has faith they'll be wanted. The commercial world would stop if there was no such thing as faith. So, men, with our religion—without faith it is impossible to please God; and the man without faith is practically dead spiritually. Then there is *Hope*. Tennyson speaks of "the mighty hopes that make us men," and it is hope that inspires every fellow in life. The student works on in hope of the day when success will be his; the young clerk or mechanic plods on day after day with the hope that some day he may be able to marry the girl of his heart. And many an unknown hero is playing a hard and difficult game, "keeping his end up," inspired by Hope. And isn't Hope one of the greatest incentives in our Christian life? The Hope of increased strength to resist temptation; of being able to make this old world of ours better; and the hope of the final reward of those who endure to the end.

THE THIRD WICKET WE HAVE TO DEFEND IS A GOOD CONSCIENCE.

Life may be hard, our lot difficult; temptations may assail us on all sides; but the man who has a good

conscience can surmount every obstacle and be calm amidst the fiercest storm. Oh, men! at all costs keep a good conscience, "void of offence towards God and man," and your innings in life will be a success and of use to your Captain and side, even if you don't make a big score, and thus get famous. Then in a big match there are

THE SPECTATORS

—how keen they are! How they "barrack" for their supporters, and some unsportsmenlike fellows "boo" the opposing side. Many a man has been inspired to a great effort by the applause of the crowd, and by the approval of some old veteran athlete, like W. G. Grace. A great crowd of spectators are watching how we play the Christian game—old warriors and athletes for God now enjoying their rest are eagerly noting every stroke. Let this thought "buck us up," when we feel lonely and discouraged; when we think we are "on our own," and that nobody notices or cares. By-and-bye we'll meet the old veterans, and together we shall be able to yarn over our experiences and fight over again our battles against sin and the devil.

Another thought is that in a team there are

MEN OF DIFFERENT ABILITIES.

Some are great bats, like Armstrong or Trumper; others, good bowlers, like Cotter, or good fielders; but they are all necessary for the success of the eleven; none can be done without. So on the Christian side we have different abilities and powers. Some get famous and talked about and become leaders—others are little known, but they are always at their post, always there when wanted, and thus

quite as essential and necessary as the most brilliant and popular leader. The great Captain knows your worth, men, and though the world may never hear of you, yet, when the match is finished, you'll hear addressed to you as well as to the most famous, the same commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Our last thought shall be

THE WELCOME HOME.

It's a great day of rejoicing when the team comes home—we go and meet them—our papers recount all they have done, and the players themselves rejoice at being home, and at having won the applause of their countrymen. True cricketers at such times welcome men who, like Fielder in the last English Test, "kept their end up," just as heartily as the man with the best bowling or batting average. And it will be a great day for us when we get our Welcome Home—when we enter the eternal city and be once again with those we have loved and lost for a while. Keep that day ever before you, brothers, and let the memory of it inspire you to "play the man."

PLAYING THE MAN.

"Be of good courage and let us play the men for our people and for the cities of our God, and the Lord do that which seemeth Him good."—2 Sam. x. 12.

HOW THESE words thrill us, and make us feel ready to do anything for our country! What were the circumstances that called them forth? The King of a friendly nation had died, and David had sent messengers to express his sympathy with the bereaved kingdom; but some of the princes of the country, probably sore at not being "in the running" for the Crown, declared it was only a dodge on David's part to spy out the land, and so insulted his messengers. The result was "ructions," and finally—war. When things had got so far, the Ammonites got into a funk, and hired the Syrians to help them. They had no Long Toms or lyddite shell in those days; all fighting was at close quarters; and they decided to attack David from the front and from the rear at the same time. Joab, the commander-in-chief of David's army, saw through the dodge, and detailed Abishai to look after the Ammonites, and formed the army into battle array, and just before the fight commenced he sent a message to Abishai, arranging that if either were pressed during the fight the other would come to his assistance, and he added these stirring words, "Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people and for the cities of our God, and the Lord do that which seemeth Him good."

Here at once we learn the

LESSON OF MUTUAL HELP.

There was nothing of the "big brother swagger" about Joab; he realised that the fight was going to be a stiff one, and that he might need help himself just as likely as Abishai. My brother, in this I can see a picture of the Church of God—a great host arrayed against the forces of the devil, and, alas that it should be so, but the devil has often won because we have thought only of ourselves, and have had no thought of mutual help—high and low, parson and layman, uniting against one common foe. Thank God, we are waking up from this; we are beginning to realise that the Church can't win unless its leaders and members are united, and "pulpit and pew" fight as brothers side by side. Then, and then only shall we be invincible. In the heat of battle men forget their jealousies. Get into the fight, men, remembering that "talk divides, but work unites," and go ahead as a united host for God's work. I read again a second lesson—

THE LESSON OF MANLY HEROISM.

Never was there nobler sentiment on the field of battle—never a grander testimony for God, and Joab stands out as *a Hero*. We can be heroes, men, too; we may have less showy work than a leader of an army, but it's equally important. When fighting quietly, and, as you think, unobserved, against sin, refuse to knock under, for God knows, God helps, and God wins.

STICK AT IT MEN—BE HEROES.

Again, in this Old Testament story, I see an

EXAMPLE OF TRUE PATRIOTISM.

Men, for the sake of glory and fame and preferment, have risked their lives; but this wasn't the spirit of Joab—there was nothing of this about him. "For our people and for the cities of God—for God and country," was the patriotic war cry that sent these men on to victory. It was no silly, empty Jingo shout, but a call to action and to danger. My brothers, the Empire to-day calls for us, and there is need for loyal men and true. There are foes more deadly and unrelenting than any foreign enemy—the foes of drink and lust, of impurity and vice, are amongst us—and God calls us to the front to fight against them. "Be of good courage, therefore, and let us play the man." I see lastly in this story an

EXAMPLE OF GENUINE PIETY.

We men are a bit afraid of that word, "piety"—it sounds "goody-goody," and we fight shy, and rightly so, of religious prigs. But there was nothing of the prig about Joab—he wasn't a saint, but he had a firm faith in God, and was content with the knowledge that God knew best—let Him do what seemeth Him good. How this simplifies life, to know that God has planned all for us, and marked out every step. Let us go back into our daily toil with this knowledge, content to leave our lives in God's hands; let us fight on bravely for Him, and come what may, we, like Joab, will have that joy which comes even in sorrow to the fellow who can say, "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good."

A SOLEMN QUESTION.

"What shall I do then with Jesus, which is called Christ."—St. Matt. xxvii. 22.

QUESTIONS OFTEN stick in our memory long after other things are forgotten, and the questions of the Bible stick because they are full of deep interest and oftentimes of warning. Where art thou? Whither goest thou? Whom seekest thou?—you have only to name these to start a train of thought at once. But perhaps the question of our text is the most solemn of all, because it brings before us the great fact that

CHRIST CONDESCENDS TO BE JUDGED BY MEN,

and that we are compelled to pass our opinion upon Him. Strange rumours had reached the Royal Palace of the doings of Jesus in the country districts. These reports told of the dead being raised to life again, the blind being restored to sight, multitudes being fed in a miraculous manner, and Pilate had, I dare say, gossiped about these things with others of his household, and, like them, had sneered at and made fun of the whole thing. Still, when he heard that this new Teacher, this miracle-Worker, was in Jerusalem, he was doubtless filled with curiosity to see Him, but unwilling to mix himself up in any bother, he probably only saw Christ from a distance—perhaps from the roof of his palace as Jesus passed along the street. Pilate knew of the opposition of the Jews to this Teacher; he knew what fierce fanatics they were, and so I can fancy

him saying, "Bother these Jews. Why can't they be quiet and let things alone. Anyway,

I'LL KEEP OUT OF IT."

You can imagine, therefore, with what feelings of annoyance and anger he would hear that a procession of priests and Levites from the Sanhedrin were desirous to see him. It would have been unwise to refuse to grant them an interview, and so he went out to them and saw in their midst Jesus, with His hands bound, and with a cord thrown round His neck, signifying that he had already been condemned by the Jews. At once Pilate's rough sense of Roman justice was aroused; he could see through the jealousy of the Jews; he knew something of their bitterness, and so, turning angrily upon them, he said, What accusation bring ye against this Man? The question surprised them; they didn't know what to say; they only wanted leave to kill; they could bring no accusation against Him at all. And, my brothers, isn't it just the same to-day? What accusation? Well, he opened the eyes of the blind; He cleansed some lepers; and since those days He has spoken peace to thousands of men; He has changed by His teaching the whole social condition of the world—the only thing that can be said of Him is that He is the greatest Teacher the world has ever seen. This is the only accusation men can bring.

THE MATTER WAS A PERSONAL ONE.

What shall *I* do with Jesus? Pilate was perfectly convinced of Christ's innocence, and so are the great majority of men to-day. They believe in their hearts at any rate that Christ was really what He declared Himself to be—the Son of God.

PILATE TRIED TO PUT THE RESPONSIBILITY ON
SOMEBODY ELSE.

Having heard that Christ was of Galilee, he sent Him to Herod, who happened to be in Jerusalem at the time, and he doubtless returned to his quarters and congratulated himself upon his smartness in getting rid of a very disagreeable job. But it was all of no use. The tramp of men sounds in the street below, and again Christ is brought in and stands before Pilate, who, vacillating between what his conscience tells him is right, and his eager desire for popular favour, cries, with a voice full of agitation, What shall *I* do with Jesus? You deal with Him yourselves; judge Him according to your law. Men, it's *an awfully solemn thought* that we each have to decide about Christ. The question comes to every individual as it came to Pilate—What shall *I* do with Jesus?—There's no getting away from it; nobody can answer it for us; the choice is left absolutely in our own hands; Heaven or hell depends upon our decision, and either is ours for the asking. Again, it is

A QUESTION DEMANDING AN IMMEDIATE DECISION.

Unpleasant questions are often put off, and the reply deferred; and Pilate would willingly have postponed this, but he couldn't. There stood the Prisoner, there were the accusers—an answer *must* be given, and so Pilate took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, declaring, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person." But all the waters of the world's oceans can't wash the stain off the hands of the man who, perfectly convinced Christ was innocent, knowing perfectly well what he ought to do, yet "delivered Jesus to be crucified."

My brothers, this afternoon the Christ of God stands in front of us, and ere we leave this church we *must* give an answer to our text, "What shall I do with Jesus?" Shall our reply be, "Go Thy way—we want our Barabbas; our besetting sin"—or shall it be a glad decision to serve Him and be His true and faithful soldier and servant unto our lives' end?

Oh, what will you do with Jesus?

The call comes low and sweet;
And tenderly He bids you

Your burdens lay at His feet.

O soul, so sad and weary,

That sweet Voice speaks to thee;

Then, what will you do with Jesus?

Oh, what shall the answer be?

A REMARKABLE SOCIAL EVENING.

"Belshazzar, the King, made a great feast to a thousand of his lords. . . . In that night was Belshazzar slain."—Dan. v. 1 and 30.

IT WAS a remarkable Social we had the other night ; but the one described in our text was much more remarkable. Belshazzar had got together, what we've been trying so long to get, a thousand men, and they had been having a good time, feasting for we don't know how long—certainly it was much longer than our Social, and even those three hours without a drink made some of you feel pretty bad ! But when the King and his friends had eaten and drank until they were muddled, they sent and brought in the vessels of God out of the Temple, and profaned them by using them in their drunken orgy. In the midst of all the row and noise, the fingers of a man's hand were seen tracing letters upon the wall of the dining hall, and one man, half drunk, rubbed his eyes and wondered if he were dreaming ; another, perhaps, would joke about it, and tell him he saw double ; but as those mysterious fingers steadily went on writing, there could be no mistake about it ; every face turned deadly pale ; a great hush fell upon the company ; their consciences were aroused ; and when a man's conscience is stirred, his lips are generally silent.

GREAT FEAR FELL UPON THEM.

and at once—like people to-day, when they get into a funk and think they are going to die—off they sent for the parsons, and the wise men entered, saw

the writing on the wall, whispered together, shook their heads, and at last had to confess they couldn't read or understand it. And then they remembered Daniel, now a poor old man in prison rags, and he was dragged in, and every neck was craned, every ear strained to listen to what he would say. He knew his Father's writing, he understood the message, and, in plain terms, told the King and his courtiers that it was the sentence of God upon him; that his day of opportunity had gone; that his kingdom was finished; and even while he yet was speaking Cyrus the Persian, having diverted the river from its course, marched along its bed, and entered the city of Babylon, and ere the scene of that night's debauch was cleared away, Belshazzar's blood mingled with the wine that had been spilt in the banquet hall.

"That night they slew him on his royal throne,
The hour unnoticed and the hand unknown;
Lifeless and sceptreless Belshazzar lay—
A robe of purple round a form of clay."

Such is the story—now for its lessons: Belshazzar was a fool, you say, and jolly well deserved all he got—but stop a moment; let us see if we are very much better. He was

UNGRATEFUL FOR HIS DAILY MERCIES.

For eighteen years he had been King over a great kingdom—he had a good time in life—wealth, pleasure, health, plenty of so-called friends, everything in this world that heart could desire, but you will search in vain for one single note of gratitude—for one word of acknowledgment of God's goodness to him. I fear some of us are like him in this respect. God has been awfully good to us. We have health

and comfort, friends and pleasure, everything to make life happy, and we take it all quite as a matter of course, or as only the due reward of our exertions, and never thank God, Who holds our breath in the hollow of His hand, for His preservation and goodness and love. Isn't it so, men?

Then again

BELSHAZZAR DESPISED THE LESSONS OF THE PAST.

He had had the example of his father and grandfather before him to serve as warnings. He knew perfectly well the rewards of doing well, and the evil results of doing ill, and yet he deliberately turned his back upon the warnings, and tried to stifle, amid his dissipation, the voice of history, the voice of conscience, and the voice of God. And, men, some of us are doing just the same. There isn't a fellow here to-day that hasn't been warned, and doesn't know—alas! sometimes from bitter personal experience—that if a man serves the devil, he's got to pay the price; and yet we go muddling on, hoping somehow, someday, it will be all right, and trying to drown the warning voices by further scenes of revelry and sin. I think here again Belshazzar has many modern imitators.

BELSHAZZAR ALSO IGNORED HIS ENEMIES,

and thought he was strong enough to resist any force that might come against him. Babylon's walls were high and strong, the sentinels were alert and well posted—what need he fear though the enemy were outside? There they would have to stop until tired out, when they would return to their own land. We needn't remind ourselves, brothers, that we have enemies—fierce, bitter, unrelenting—and many a chap

has been overcome by them, because he has underestimated their strength. "Oh, yes, I know," says one, "that drink is my enemy; but I'm not afraid of it. I've got plenty of strength to defeat it. No fear of *me* getting under its power." A few years or months or even weeks pass, and the man finds to his bitter cost that he is absolutely the slave of his enemy. He'd give worlds to defeat it, and free himself from its toils, but he cannot. So is it with lust, with gambling, and with many other enemies of men's souls. Silently they come, sneaking up the back way like the Persians, and because we have expected an open frontal attack we are caught unawares and carried off captive or slain amidst our sin. Never, men, ignore your enemy, never underestimate his strength, but fight him tooth and nail; give him no quarter and no mercy until by God's help you are able to stand upon him victorious. Perhaps Belshazzar's worst crime of all was that

HE INSULTED GOD.

In his wild debauchery he ordered the vessels to be brought from the Temple—the vessels dedicated to the service of the Lord Jehovah—and he and his lords, his wives and his concubines drank wine out of these, and praised the gods of silver and gold, of brass and iron, and wood and stone; but said Belshazzar, "the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified."

God has other vessels dedicated for His service—the temples of our body are created for His glory and praise in the world; and yet men take them and give them to the service of the devil, and God is insulted every day. Men, how are you using your

bodies, your talents, yourselves? God holds us each one responsible for the use we make of them. Beware, then, lest like Belshazzar we insult Him, and lose not only our lives, but also the kingdom of eternal happiness that God has created for men hereafter.

I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And then go out to glorify Him by an earnest Christian life, and by rescuing others for whom Christ died.

NAAMAN.

"Now Naaman, captain of the host of the King of Syria, was a great man and honourable, but he was a leper."—2 Kings v. 1.

WE HAVE all of us at one time or another stood before some beautiful picture and admired its colouring and artistic skill ; and we can imagine what such a picture would look like if some madman daubed a brushful of tar across the canvas. This seems to be exactly the case in the picture of Naaman, which is given to us in the Bible.

The word Naaman means "pleasant," and at first sight it is truly a pleasant picture that is unfolded. He was commander-in-chief of the army, he was a great man with his master, and honourable, he was also a mighty man of valour, *but*—that little word spoils it all—he was a leper. How frequently do we see the same to-day—a rich, happy family circle, yet with some skeleton in the cupboard hidden away, but always a terror—always spoiling the perfect happiness of the home life. It may be drink or gambling, it may be impurity and lust, it may be the memory of past sins and the stain they have left behind, but whatever it is, it is the *but* that spoils the picture and saddens the life. Now

NAAMAN WAS A GREAT MAN WITH HIS MASTER.

He was what we should call "the King's white-haired boy"—a great favourite at court, and one upon whose judgment in military matters the King could rely. Very often such people are spoilt—they suffer

with "swollen head," and the "boss's favourites" are frequently the workmen's aversions. Naaman was an exception; he was not only a great man with his master, and served him well, but he was also *honourable*—not with a mere title in front of his name—the Honourable Captain Naaman—but honourable in his character and life. He had not fettered his own nest, or oppressed those under him, but—as the margin translates the word honourable—he was "gracious," easy of access, ready to receive deputations, and willing to do his best for his fellow countrymen. Further, he was a

MIGHTY MAN OF VALOUR.

In every age of the world's history men have respected valour and bravery, but especially so in those olden times; and the songs of nations centre round the deeds and exploits of their heroes on the battlefield; and Naaman's fame would often be recited round the camp fire, or told to the younger generation of Syrians. What a pity that to a life like his there should be a *but*!

NAAMAN HAD HIS OWN IDEAS HOW HE WAS TO GET CURED,

and so off he started, loaded with presents—about £12,000—and came and stood with his great cavalcade before the house of Elisha in a little side street of Samaria. What a commotion it would make—everybody would come out to look at this great warrior—St. Patrick's Day procession wouldn't be in it!—all the children would crowd round, and perhaps a little chap might have cried out, as they often do to-day, "My eye! Ain't it fine?"

Still,

NAAMAN WAS A LEPER,

and not being treated with, as he thought, proper courtesy, he was extremely angry. "Behold I thought, he will surely come out to me and stand and call upon his God, and strike his hand over the place and recover the leper." Instead of which, Elisha only sent a messenger to him with what he regarded as an insulting message—"Go wash in Jordan seven times"—so he turned and went away in a rage.

How frequently have we done the same thing! "Parsons say so-and-so, but I think differently. If I go to church occasionally and subscribe to charity, I'll be all right." In other words, just as Naaman tried to buy his cure, so we try to buy eternal life. It was only when he was willing to lay aside his own opinion and do what the prophet told him that he was healed. "Go and wash in Jordan." "Behold I thought, he will surely come out to me." What a difference between the two!—man's way useless; God's way giving happiness and with it the certain knowledge of cleansing.

Men, see to it that our own ideas agree with God's; be willing, as Naaman was—because he knew his need—to lay aside our opinions—our own way of being healed—and accept *God's* way. If the prophet had told Naaman to do some great thing—endow a hospital or put a stained glass window in the synagogue, or go and slay twenty or thirty men, he'd have been off like a shot to do it. It was just because God's plan was so simple that he found it hard. And isn't it

THE SIMPLICITY OF THE GOSPEL

that makes it hard for us? If pardon and power over sin could be ours by purchase, we'd very soon save up and buy it, even if we had to give up smoking for a year! If we could get it by doing some great work or penance, we would gladly do it. But *God's* way is simply the realisation of our need, and then obeying His order—"Go wash and be clean." Cast yourselves, then, men, into that Fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, let God's power cleanse you, and then go out and testify to others the same testimony that Naaman gave—"Behold, now I *know* that there is no God in all the earth but the Lord."

BUT.

"Lord, I will follow Thee, 'but.'"—St Luke ix. 61.

THAT LITTLE word, "but," spoilt it all ; it was the viper which was sucking the life out of an apparently whole-hearted desire to follow Christ. And we still find many in our midst to-day who are doing the same as the young man in our text. "I know God's will is perfect—His word is truth. Sometimes, as I've thought about His love and care, I've vowed to follow Him ; *but*——"

"I would follow Christ," says one, "but

I DON'T BELIEVE THE BIBLE.

It is considered fashionable and smart and up-to-date in some circles to say this ; but I've never yet met a sceptic who has read the Bible through. They read reviews about it, and cheap magazine articles on it, and that is all ; and yet they *dare* say, "I don't believe what the Bible says." A popular novel is published, everybody is talking about it, and you are asked what you think of it, and you say, "Well, I can't express an opinion—I haven't read it. I've read the reviews about it, but I haven't read the book itself, and so cannot speak about it." And yet here is a book which has stood the wear and tear of centuries—which has aroused more interest than any other book in the world—and you *dare* to say, without even reading it, that it isn't true, and that, therefore, all who believe in it are deluded ! I grant you

there are things in the Bible hard to understand—the wise men and scholars for nineteen hundred years have been digging out its store of wisdom, and haven't got to the bottom of it yet. It's the Father's revelation to His children, and you won't understand it until you join the family circle. A letter written by a father to his child is placed in your hands. You know neither of them, and consequently you will find a very great deal in that letter that you don't understand—family matters which have no interest for you. So, men, before you condemn the Bible, join the family circle of Christ—obey His voice, and “if any man will do His will he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.”

Another fellow says, “I would like to follow Christ, but

I DON'T BELIEVE IN CHRISTIANS ;

they are either humbugs or else the most bitter creatures I've ever met.” But, my brothers, bad messengers don't affect the message. A telegraph boy brings you a telegram containing good news—it makes no difference to you if the boy is white or black. A lawyer writes to tell you that property has been left to you. You may dislike the lawyer, and think him a fraud, but you wouldn't because of this be so foolish as to refuse the property. If a bad coin is put into the collection everybody talks about it, but no notice is taken of the good coins. Notice the good Christians, and leave the bad alone. There are good coins, and good Christians for our example, and as long as we have the example of Christ Himself we have no excuse whatever for not accepting Christ's invitation.

A third excuse for not following Christ is

"I DON'T SEE ANY NEED OF RELIGION,

or, rather, of what you call 'conversion.' It may be all right for out-and-out sinners, drunkards, and such like, but I've never done any harm to anyone, and I'm quite as good as the folk who go to church. Perhaps when I get old I may 'turn religious'; it may be a useful thing to die with, but I don't want it now." Can anything be more contemptible, men, than this—ignoring God all through life—serving the world and the devil, and then, when we are nearing the great Unknown, and cannot see what lies ahead, turning to God in order that we may be saved? A dying soldier, on being urged to give himself to God, exclaimed, "I've served the devil all my life—I can't be so mean as to give God the dregs that are left." Oh, my brothers, give God your hearts and lives now—let the "buts" go—and then go out and follow and serve Him, and you will find day by day that His service is perfect freedom, and that by-and-bye at His right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

SOWING AND REAPING.

"Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap."—Gal. vi. 7.

IF CHRISTIANITY is to be spread in the world it will be by the influence of Christians themselves. Christ left us with this commission, this responsibility laid upon us, "Ye are My witnesses." True men are wanted for this work—not goody-goody, but real men. "St. Paul was right," said a popular preacher in addressing a class of divinity students, "when he told Timothy to put off the old man. But for God's sake," he added, "don't put on the old woman!" There is need for a manly Christianity in the daily life, and the personal responsibility is laid upon us to carry it there. Don't say the Church has failed, or that the parsons have a soft job on; the point is,

WHAT IS YOUR OWN INDIVIDUAL INFLUENCE?

Is it for God or for the devil? We are aware of two forces at work in the world—the power of evil and the power of good—and isn't it a despicable thing that *men* should be found on the side of evil, yet deceiving themselves about Heaven and God? There are plenty of deceivers in the world—in business circles you meet the plausible, oily-tongued swindlers and cheats, who fatten upon the foolishness of honest folk; in philanthropic life they are met with also; but, worst of all, in religious life they abound; and yet they are really one of the strong proofs of Christianity. If there were no good coins in the

world people wouldn't coin bad ones, and if there were no good Christians the devil wouldn't waste his time manufacturing bad ones. But, though men may deceive their neighbours, they cannot deceive God, Who sees not the outward actions, but the hidden motives—the secrets of the heart, and what we sow there—in secret—out of sight—*that* shall we reap. The American evangelist, the late Mr. D. L. Moody, has some suggestions and practical thoughts on this text, which I will use as pegs to pass on to you men this afternoon some lessons from our text; and the first is that

A MAN EXPECTS TO REAP MORE THAN HE SOWS.

Nobody but a fool would keep on sowing and never reap anything. An apprentice expects to reap the reward of his years of apprenticeship—a farmer expects to reap more than he sows—he sows a seed, and expects to reap a bushel. And even in daily life we know it is true that a man who sows good deeds reaps his harvest here. An old lady, fearful of the traffic, stood trembling on the kerbstone in Regent-street some little time ago, afraid to cross the busy thoroughfare. A gentleman, seeing her distress, offered his arm, and piloted her in safety across the street. A small crowd of people, noticing the kindly action, raised a cheer, and the flush of pleasure that rose to the young man's cheeks told plainly that he was reaping the reward of his good deed. But, men, the opposite is also true—

EVERY EVIL DEED ALSO BRINGS ITS REWARD

—every sin committed is multiplied, and it's an appalling and yet true thought to realise that men are going through the world breathing out seeds of evil from which one day a terrible harvest will be

reaped. Better, far better, for the world if they had never lived. Oh, men, *what* is your influence?

Moody's second point was that

A MAN REAPS THE SAME KIND AS HE SOWS.

If we sow thistles we don't reap wheat; if we sow peas we don't expect to reap apricots; and yet in religious matters men are sowing *sin*, and expect to reap Heaven. Listen, men, to those words of warning, "He that soweth of the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that soweth of the spirit shall reap eternal life." There is no mistake about it—it's not like some speeches of our politicians—hard to make head or tail of, or capable of being interpreted in two ways. It's quite plain and distinct, "Whatsoever a man soweth, *that* shall he also reap." May God show us what we are sowing, what our lives have been, and then, as we realise their weakness and failure, let us come in humble faith to the One Who understands us and our difficulties and weaknesses, Who will give us strength that we may sow henceforth seeds of good and of righteousness, for which one day we shall reap a golden harvest of reward.

ELECTION LESSONS.

"If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him."—1 Kings xviii. 21.

I'M NOT going to give a "party" address this afternoon, neither am I going to tell you what I think of the election returns. The results are out, the Labour Party have a great majority, and a great opportunity before them, and therefore it cannot be out of place if to-day we remind them also that they have a

VERY GREAT AND SOLEMN RESPONSIBILITY

laid upon them. The wisest and most far-seeing statesmen in all lands look forward anxiously to the future; nations are armed to the teeth, empires crowded with a seething mass of people are looking for fresh outlets for their children—where shall they find them, and, having found them, how shall they possess them?

THERE IS ANOTHER SIDE,

as it specially affects us in this great and good land we hold in trust. Envious eyes are cast towards its virgin soil, as yet undimmed with blood and unpolluted by the alien feet of an invading foe. So it surely is not out of place to dwell to-day upon the

RESPONSIBILITY OF GOVERNMENT,

to remind our politicians of the great trust reposed in them, to remind them of the fact that they are not elected for any one class or party, but to legislate wisely and deliberately for Australia as a whole

and for the welfare of our great Empire, and to lay a sound foundation against any impending storms.

LET US ALSO WHO ARE NOT MEMBERS

refrain from wild criticism, and rather pray to the great Guide of all nations' destinies that He will grant them wisdom and guide their deliberations.

I resent strongly—and many Socialists and Labour men agree with me in this—the statement which was recently made in public that they as a party are opposed to Christianity and deny the truth of Jesus Christ. Many, I know, among their ranks, are earnest Christian men who are alive to their responsibility, and seek the true welfare of the people along the line of righteousness.

Now let us see if we can get any helpful lessons from our daily life; and first, I notice

THE POWER OF ORGANISATION.

It's true in this world that "nothing worth having is got without cost." Some of you married or engaged men know this. It was jolly hard work to get your girl to say "yes" to the all-important question you asked her; but you persevered, and at last succeeded—perhaps some of you wish now you hadn't! The student knows if success is to be his it can only come after steady perseverance and long hours of hard work. And the Labour Party have reaped to-day the reward of long years of careful preparation and organising—nothing has been left to chance. My brothers, and especially my younger ones, let us learn a lesson from this, and plod on in the spirit of the one who said "Blessed be drudgery," looking forward to the reward that always comes from faithful work well done.

We also learn again the old adage, that

UNION IS STRENGTH.

We have seen a great object lesson. A party composed of many heterogeneous elements has stood before the electors as one united party, with one great aim. Minor differences and individual opinions have been sunk for the good of the whole, and success has been the reward. What an object-lesson for our Church is here! We ought to be one great united party, with only one great aim—God's glory; but, alas, instead of this we are split up into many different factions, each with their own particular fad or party cry, and as a consequence we present to the world a party torn asunder by conflicting interests; and the influence of the Church and of Christianity is thereby sadly weakened. May God forgive us and bestow upon us the spirit of union that we may with one mind and one mouth witness to the world the power of our risen Lord.

Another election lesson is that

EVERYBODY SHOULD VOTE.

Everybody should have an opinion and act on it. One of the facts noticeable about this last election is the low percentage of votes recorded, and when the results were declared several felt disappointed they hadn't voted, and, when too late, reproached themselves for their indifference or laziness or both. My brothers, at the great Final Election, when the results are made known, many will be disappointed—many who remained indifferent or held themselves aloof from Christ will be classed with those who voted against Him, and, when too late, they will find themselves shut out from God's presence. Be decided, men—vote for Christ here, work for His cause, and by-and-bye you'll hear the "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

THREE MEN IN A FIRE.

"Three men bound in the midst of the fire. . . . Lo, I see four men loose, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."—Dan. iii. 24 and 25.

A FIGHT in the slums was in progress between a big hulking fellow and a sturdy little chap, and as I got near I heard cries of "Go it, little 'un. ' I'll back the nipper"—the crowd's sympathy was with the little, weaker chap. So it usually is, and this is what gives a peculiar and ever fresh interest to the tale of the three lonely foreigners who, for their faith and loyalty to God, suffered so much in ancient Babylon alone against Cyrus, King of Persia, and his murderous crew. It seems to me that the first piece of our text gives

A TRUE PICTURE OF LIFE.

Every man amongst us knows what temptation is, what trials are, and some know what it is to have the furnace heated sevenfold and the white-heat of passion blazing within. Don't underrate the power of temptation, men! It's an awful thing. It's only the raw recruit who rushes headlong into the fight—the old veterans know the horrors of war—the awfulness of a battle field. And, men, it's an awful thing to be devil-possessed—to feel the fire burning within, and to know of no power that can help or quench its blazing flame.

Now, let's turn to the story, and try and get some practical lessons from it. First, I notice that

THESE MEN WERE NOT IN THE FURNACE BECAUSE GOD
WAS ANGRY WITH THEM.

God permitted it in order that, by their testing, they might be stronger, better fellows. We like to listen most of us, at any rate, to the sound of bells—that is, provided they don't wake us up too early on a Sunday morning!—but every bell worthy of the name—I don't mean the old tin kettle we call a bell!—has to be tested and put through the fire to see if it rings true. And God allows us to be put in the fire, to be exposed to the flames of sin and temptation, in order that we may be strengthened and ring true amidst the world's discords.

The old Roman, Cato, once asked, "I wonder what will become of Rome when she no longer has an enemy to fear?" And the answer was given shortly afterwards when Rome fell, destroyed not so much by the foes without as by the enemy of debauchery and social decay within. Without temptation we should be like jelly-fish—men without any backbone or grit in us. Don't be downhearted, then, when temptation comes, but remember it is permitted by an all-wise Father for our good. And

"Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin;
Each victory will help you some other to win."

Then I notice also that

THESE MEN WERE BOUND,

and plenty of fellows are to-day. Some are *bound by habits*. We are creatures of habit, and once we get into the way of doing a thing it's very hard to get out of it. Frequently we clergy hear a man giving as his excuse for neglecting God's House, "Oh, I've got out of the habit of going." Others are bound

by *fear of their fellows*—they'll face a cannon, but they won't face the sneer of their fellow workmen, and, afraid of this, they go on day after day living their life of bondage and fear, knowing what is right, and yet afraid to do it. A third lot are *bound by sin*. They hate themselves for it, and would give all they possess to be able to break the chain, but they cannot. It makes them miserable, and they are inclined to go away into some quiet corner and kick themselves for yielding. Oh, brothers, if this describes your condition, learn this great helpful lesson from these three brave captives—that God can break the strongest chain ever forged round the human will—if you really are in earnest and want it broken—and enable you to live a life of freedom and victory over sin. Put Him to the test, try it for yourselves, and come and tell me the result in three months' time. The last lesson we notice is that

GOD WAS WITH THEM IN THE FURNACE

—“the form of the fourth was as the Son of God.” Here's the grandest lesson of all. As long as life lasts we shall be tempted, but “it's one thing to be tempted, and another thing to fall”; and isn't it ripping to know that if we want Him, God will be alongside of us in the fiercest furnace of sin and temptation, and we can find, as the three heroes for God found, that the fire has no hurt upon us—it leaves no mark, and we shall emerge from it purified, tested, and strengthened, to fight more valiantly for God and His Church, and be able to do some good to our fellow men.

JOHN THE BAPTIST.

"Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist."—St. Matt. xi. 11.

"MOTHER," SAID a child, walking through a cemetery, and noticing all the good things on the tombstones about the dead, "where are the bad people buried?" Books of biography are often like the tombstones—the good is recorded at great length, but the bad is omitted. It's just here that the Bible differs in that it gives a *true* biography of the lives it records; the good is mentioned, but also the bad, and we can therefore rely upon getting the true character of those whose records are found there.

JOHN'S LIFE WAS A GREAT CONTRAST.

His birth was foretold by an angel, and you can well imagine the excitement among the aunties and uncles when he arrived. We see the same to-day—all the women folk get terribly excited, and the poor husband gets neglected and ignored, and feels terribly out of it!

"What manner of child shall this be?" is the question asked now, and asked by the admiring relatives of John. "Isn't he like his father?" says one. "Not a bit," says another; "he's the image of his mother." And when his first tooth arrives the excitement is simply tremendous! Yes, everybody was wildly excited when John was born, and a great and glorious life was predicted for him. And yet, contrast with this

HIS TRAGIC END.

A lonely dungeon, dark and damp, a young man chained, an executioner enters, and in a few moments the head of this young man, whose life promised so much, was carried in a dish by a dancing girl to her mother, and all was over. And yet this was the man who was announced as the Herald of the Messiah! Let us look at his life this afternoon, and see if we can't get some lessons from it that will help us to be better men, and make us braver and truer to God. Let us look at him first

AS A MAN,

because a fellow doesn't lose his manhood by becoming a Christian. Christ tells us that John was a *great man*—what a grand reference! References to-day aren't worth much. We say that a man can clean boots and knives well, or milk cows, but we say nothing, very often, about a man's *true* character—sometimes it's better not to! But here is a man who got an absolutely reliable, full and true character from Christ Himself, summed up in these words, "A great man." John didn't perform any miracles, and a man isn't necessarily great because he does—the great men are those who can perform the miracle of conquering themselves. If John had been a miracle-worker, or an orator, or a great statesman we should feel that his life and example, excellent as it was, would be of no real help to us ordinary folk. But because he was a man of like passions to ourselves, we feel we can get a few hints from him for life's battle. Then John was also

ABSOLUTELY FEARLESS.

It's very easy to denounce sin in church or in general terms, but it's very hard to do it to a man's face, especially if he's a bigger fellow than you! But

it's far harder to do it to a King. But up goes John straight to His Majesty, and declared, "It is not *lawful* to live as you are doing." I expect the King would be dumbfounded—"what awful cheek to speak to me like that," I can imagine him saying—while others round would tell John he was a fool. "Why on earth did you say that? Why not have told him it wasn't expedient, or it would be better for the kingdom if he gave up the life he was living? Why, the woman's brother may shoot you." Such-like advice, I doubt not, was freely given; but sin to John was sin in whatever rank he found it, and though his plain-speaking cost him his freedom and his life, yet he had no fear, because he had done what he knew was right. Would to God there were more men like him in the world to-day, who, instead of making excuses for sin or painting it in rosy colours, would denounce it plainly and fearlessly, in whatever rank it was found. We should soon get a much better tone in society, and the world would be a cleaner, healthier place to live in. John was not only absolutely fearless, he was also

ABSOLUTELY TRUE.

He preached, not because he was paid a big stipend, but because he had a message from God to deliver, and because he wanted to help his fellow men. And the crowds flocked to hear him—not to a comfortable church, with nicely cushioned seats—but to the bank of the Jordan—because he was so transparently sincere and genuine and true. Why is it, men, to-day, that our sons "go off on the loose"? Isn't it because we are not sincere—not true in our home life, and our children don't believe in our religion? A young man whom I once knew was fast drifting towards atheism and infidelity, and he told me long afterwards that what arrested him and made

him (what he is to-day) an earnest Christian, was not preaching or praying, but his father's sincerity. Fathers, see to it that your children can look upon you as sincere and genuine in your religion, and in after years, depend upon it, they will arise and call you blessed, and you will have the joy here or hereafter of receiving your reward.

The last point we shall notice about John is

HIS HUMILITY.

It is not easy to play second fiddle—to sink into insignificance, after being a popular idol, and we are not unfamiliar with the people who, even in John's day, tried to stir up strife in the Church. "A new Preacher," say they, "has arisen, and all men flock to hear Him. We had better tell John; and he must wake up, or else we shan't have any congregation left." John had little sympathy with them or with their complaints, and, instead of being distressed or upset, he rejoiced greatly at their news—declared himself to be only the herald of this new Preacher, and that his greatest joy was to know of Christ's success. How easily he could have acted otherwise, and stirred up a lot of sympathy for himself; but nothing of the kind for a moment ever crossed his mind. He was willing—nay, glad—to decrease in order that his Master might increase. Men, what a lesson for us all lies here! How easily we are offended, our dignity is hurt, and we either go off and sulk, or else stir up opposition and hinder God's work. God give us more of the burning zeal for our Master that John had—make us ready to be put out of sight if need be—keep us ever mindful of the fact that we are workers for God and not for ourselves; so shall our service be blessed, our lives happy, our influence powerful, and God's name be honoured by our lives.

THE CHURCH AND THE MASSES.

"The common people heard Him gladly."—St. Mark xii. 37.

THE TWO great forces—the Church and the masses—both professedly want the same thing—to make this old world better, and to establish a great brotherhood of men. Yet, between the two there is a great gulf fixed—the clergy can take an interest in social reforms of one kind or another, yet there exists in the minds of many—if not antagonism, yet a certain aloofness and indifference to the Church.

THE CHURCH HAS NOT THE CONFIDENCE OF THE WORKING CLASSES.

We gratefully recognise all that has been done—the self-denying labours of many clergy and laymen—the noble work of the C.E.M.S., and other societies of a like nature; yet the great majority of people go nowhere. *Why? Not*, I think, because democracy is becoming less sympathetic with the real Christ, or because it is more ready to repudiate His teaching, which is approved even among those who never enter a church. What, then, is the cause of this neglect of worship? First, *misunderstanding* on both sides. Too often the Church has held aloof from or opposed social reform—nearly every great one has sprung from the masses—then, when the success of the movement has been assured, it has given it an overdose of religious patronage. So, democracy has failed to understand the Church, and its

real nature and message to men. It has been quite willing to use the Church for the furtherance of its pet ideas—to welcome its power for the re-creation of society if it progressed along the lines they laid down. To-day there is a demand that

THE CHURCH SHOULD GO OVER TO THE SIDE OF LABOUR,

and throw not only its moral weight, but its political pressure also into the lap of the Labour Party, whose ideals, we are told, are identical with the ideals of Christianity. Such a demand on the part of those who make it is only a survival of that beggarly, patronising frame of mind, which the Church has done far too much to produce by its alms and doles and patronage. "The Church is not committed, and should not be, to any theory or class which does not rest on the brotherhood of men—i.e., the unity of the entire race—rich and poor alike—and so should not be sneered at if it refuses to throw itself wholly on one side or the other."

A second cause I could name is the

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE.

We are not unfamiliar with those who, while making the loudest professions of Christianity, yet keep aloof altogether from the sorrows of the toiling masses—very zealous and devout on the Sunday, but "passing by on the other side" on the Monday.

"If," said a working man to me once, in speaking of a certain professing Christian, "the likes of him will be in heaven, then I'd rather be out of it."

Working men have at bottom a keen and true idea of what Christ's teaching and principles are, and are quick to notice any inconsistency in the lives of Christians. They are sick of pious talk, but long to see Christian practice take its place.

Our third reason is more personal, and it is

THE ABSENCE OF A TRUE CHRISTIAN IDEAL

among ourselves. What is the ideal of many Christians? Their own salvation—using Christ as an Assurance Company, and Christianity as a policy against future risks. Conventions are held for the cultivation of the higher Christian graces and the deepening of Spiritual life. I would not for a moment say one word against these, but this I do say—that we expect, we have a right to expect, that *because of these*, more interest shall be taken by Christians who attend them, in combating the evils around and in defending the weak against the tyranny of the strong. In a word, that they should do far more to bring Christ's teaching into the life and work of to-day. It was this that was the great characteristic of Christ's teaching—the intensely practical nature of His message—the “tremendous reality” of the Messenger, that, while it angered the hypocrites who received no sympathy from Him, drew the people after Him, and made them hear Him gladly. We want to-day a far higher Christian ideal in our own lives. For God's sake get rid of the idea that the Church is a Convalescent Home, where we can be fed on dainties and nursed up on religious “tit-bits,” and let us bring into our daily life something of the practical religion of the Christ, and we shall find now that it is as true as ever that “the multitude will hear Him gladly.”

THE DEATH OF A FOOL.

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“Died Abner as a fool dieth.”—2 Sam. iii. 33.

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THE BIBLE is a Book of plain language, and calls things by their proper names, and in blunt terms sums up Abner as a fool—not in the sense of a lunatic or madman, but as one absolutely worthless. Why was he? What had he done? First

HE HAD PUT HIMSELF INTO THE HANDS OF HIS
ENEMY,

and when a means of escape presented itself he didn't avail himself of it, but went back to Joab, who took him on one side and slew him as a spy. Every one of us has an enemy, and it is often true that a man's worst enemy is himself. Don't put yourself into his power, or, like Abner, you'll get defeated and slain. Secondly, Abner

DIDN'T MAKE USE OF THE POWERS GOD HAD GIVEN
HIM.

“His hands (v. 34) were tied.” How many a man acts thus to-day. He falls into sin, and his excuse is, “I can't help it.” You *can*. God didn't make us like jelly-fish with no backbone—though some of us are nearly as soft!—but God created us as *men*, with grit and stamina and will, and God expects us to use the powers He has given, and not to depend upon Him, unless and until we are willing to do the best we can ourselves. Help yourself, and heaven will help you. An old tale of mythology

tells how a carter, having a heavy load on his cart, one day, came to the bottom of a steep hill, and, seeing Hercules sitting by the roadside, applied to him for help. Hercules replied, "Put your own shoulder to the wheel first, and if you can't get along, then I'll come and help." And so, men, I would say to you to-day—for goodness' sake get rid of the idea that you are weak and powerless noodles, put your own shoulder to the wheel, use the powers God has given you, and *then*, if you find that you can't get along, God will come and help you. Another lesson for us is that

ABNER PERISHED ON THE THRESHOLD OF SALVATION.

Hebron was a City of Refuge, and if he could only have got inside its gates he would have been safe. Bunyan, in his great "Pilgrim's Progress," depicts a pathway leading from just outside the gate of Heaven to the regions of the lost, and methinks many have trodden and will tread that path. Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God—*almost* a Christian—a great respect for religion—on the very threshold of salvation—and yet—lost!

How sad it is when a gallant ship, after a long voyage is wrecked as she enters harbour. But far more sad is it to see a human life thus wrecked, from lack of decision and perseverance. "Lost in sight of home." So Abner died as he had lived, and the epitaph on his grave was, "Here lies a fool." In the New Testament we have three more examples of the death of fools. First,

THE COVETOUS FOOL.

(Acts v. 1-6); Ananias, who tried to serve two masters and get wages from each. Ananias isn't by any means the last who has tried to play that game.

Plenty of people would buy Heaven gladly if it could be bought, provided they were also allowed to use earth and its amusements as they liked—we want Christ's wages, but we don't want His terms. Of course we want heaven, and hope to get there at the end, but meanwhile we'll get as much as we can out of the world, and give God as little as possible. Isn't it mean and contemptible, men, and isn't it in the light of God's Word just rank madness?—"Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." An enemy of Cæsar, hoping to obtain his favour, sent him a valuable present, which Cæsar declined, saying, "I can accept no present from him while the man's heart is in rebellion against me." So, men, it's no good thinking to propitiate God, or to earn admission to Heaven by any gifts unless we are willing to yield our lives to Christ here and to serve Him.

Then there is

THE CONCEITED FOOL

—Herod (Acts xii. 21-23). He had riches and position and influence, and, fool that he was, he imagined all these things came solely by his own ability and cuteness, and he gave not God the glory, never once thanked Him, and "he was eaten of worms and gave up the ghost." Brothers, it's a solemn warning for us. We have health and comforts and blessings, and we think that by our own power, or because we are such decent fellows, these things have come to us; but it's true of us as of Belshazzar "the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways hast thou not glorified," and God says, "Thou fool." Oh, men! let us realise and not be ashamed to confess that it is God's goodness that enables us to be prosperous and happy, that it is He and He only that can bless our labours; and as

the thought of His love is thus borne in upon us let us show our gratitude not only with our lips but in our lives by giving up ourselves to His service and by walking before Him in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life.

The third example is that of

THE RICH FOOL

who made no provision for the future (St. Luke xii. 19), but who, having had splendid harvests and wonderful seasons, was compelled to build larger barns for his goods, and said to his poor little shrivelled soul, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry." But God said unto him, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." Plenty in this world, nothing in the next—never taken the trouble to think about the future.

Walk down Collins-street and see the great buildings occupied by the Insurance Companies. What do they thrive on? How do they get their vast incomes? On human forethought—on man's provision for the future. Make provision for the future of your wife and children, but oh! brothers, don't forget to make provision for the future life of your soul, lest of you it may have to be said, "Thou fool."

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